

# ISTANBUL PROTOCOL

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING SERIES No. 8/Rev. 2

**Manual on the Effective  
Investigation and  
Documentation of Torture  
and Other Cruel, Inhuman  
or Degrading Treatment  
or Punishment**



UNITED NATIONS  
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OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

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# FOREWORD

In 2001, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published the first edition of the Istanbul Protocol, which was subsequently updated in 2004. It has since been used in medico-legal and other contexts worldwide as a valuable practical tool to effectively guide the investigation and documentation of torture and ill-treatment, protection of victims and advocacy work of civil society on behalf of victims. Building on years of experience of using the Istanbul Protocol in practice, practitioners and academics worldwide have now collected their experiences, identified good practices and highlighted the lessons learned from its use, limitations, misinterpretation or even deliberate misuse. This rich collective effort has helped to further reflect advances in the understanding of the practices and effects of torture and ill-treatment, resulting in a comprehensive update of the Istanbul Protocol.

I am therefore pleased to present the 2022 edition of the Istanbul Protocol, which builds upon the previous 2004 edition. This multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary road map is based on a large-scale international consultation that was carried out by more than 180 experts, including health, legal and human rights professionals from all regions of the world. Based on relevant provisions of international law, it provides even more concrete, clearly defined and well-understood guidelines to assist Member States, national human rights institutions, national preventive mechanisms, civil society, legal and health professionals and other relevant experts in implementing the Istanbul Protocol standards.

This new edition is the result of the cooperation among civil society, practitioners, academics and members of all United Nations anti-torture mechanisms, namely the Committee against Torture, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. The concerns of victims and a gender-based approach are placed at the centre of the revised version.

Despite good examples of legal, policy and institutional progress in law and practice, the work to combat and prevent torture is far from finished. A continuous commitment from every State is required to ensure that the legal safeguards preventing torture and ill-treatment are fully and properly implemented, that accountability for such violations is guaranteed and that the victims are provided with full and adequate reparations. The new edition of the Istanbul Protocol is a valuable tool to combat and prevent torture and an essential reference to elaborate and implement policies, as well as to train and guide a wide spectrum of actors working with victims of torture.

OHCHR remains committed to assist States to eradicate torture and ill-treatment, to implement international human rights standards effectively and to place redress for victims, including rehabilitation, at the centre of their efforts. I therefore encourage States and non-State actors, civil society, individual practitioners and everyone concerned in preventing and protecting against torture and ill-treatment to use the new edition of the Istanbul Protocol. In particular, I invite States to make the Istanbul Protocol an essential part of training for all relevant public officials and medical professionals engaged in the custody, interrogation and treatment of persons subjected to any form of arrest, detention or imprisonment. I hope that, through collaborative and collective efforts, we can combat and overcome one of the biggest challenges of our times and build a better and safer future for humanity.



**Michelle Bachelet**

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

# BACKGROUND NOTE

This is an updated edition of the *Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol)*. The Istanbul Protocol sets out international standards on how effective legal and medico-legal investigations into allegations of torture or ill-treatment should be conducted. The Istanbul Protocol was developed by 75 experts in law, health and human rights from 40 organizations in 15 countries. It was officially endorsed by the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, on 9 August 1999 and included in the Professional Training Series of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2001 and later updated in 2004. The Istanbul Protocol contains a series of “Istanbul Principles”, which articulate minimum standards for State adherence to ensure the effective investigation and documentation of torture and ill-treatment, which are further elaborated in the manual. The Istanbul Principles were promoted in resolutions of the General Assembly<sup>1</sup> and the former Commission on Human Rights in 2000<sup>2</sup> and States were called upon to disseminate the Principles widely and use them in efforts to combat torture.

The Istanbul Protocol and its Principles are routinely used as a point of reference for measuring the effectiveness of investigations into torture by the Committee against Torture, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In addition, the standards laid out in the Istanbul Protocol have been applied by regional human rights bodies, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, as well as many national institutions. In his annual report to the General Assembly in October 2014, the Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan E. Méndez, recognized the critical role of forensic and medical sciences in the investigation and prevention of torture and other ill-treatment. He stated that “The Istanbul Protocol standards serve as a standard for evaluation of medical evidence, as a reference tool for experts delivering expert opinions, as a benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of the domestic fact-finding and as a means of redress for victims” and that: “Quality forensic reports are revolutionizing the investigation of torture.”<sup>3</sup> Such recognition by United Nations human rights bodies, regional human rights courts and United Nations Special Rapporteurs has facilitated the widespread use and acceptance of the Istanbul Protocol in medico-legal and other contexts worldwide. During the past 20 years, the Istanbul Protocol and its Principles have been increasingly used by State and non-State actors to guide their investigations into torture and ill-treatment.

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 55/89.

<sup>2</sup> Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/43.

<sup>3</sup> A/69/387, paras. 59 and 64.

This present publication seeks to update and strengthen the Istanbul Protocol, through a project involving more than 180 participants from 51 countries. The project was led by representatives of four civil society organizations (Physicians for Human Rights, the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey and the Redress Trust) and four core United Nations anti-torture bodies (the Committee against Torture, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, the Special Rapporteur on torture and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture). The Istanbul Protocol Editorial Committee of this project consists of representatives of all four civil society organizations and all four core United Nations anti-torture bodies. The project received support from Dignity – Danish Institute against Torture and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, but it was otherwise supported through the dedicated commitment and time of the individual experts and organizations involved.

This large-scale international effort was undertaken to update the Istanbul Protocol in order to reflect advances in our understanding of the practices and effects of torture and ill-treatment as well as the practical experiences and lessons learned in using the Istanbul Protocol during the past 20 years. It included regional coordination meetings in Bishkek, Mexico City and Copenhagen and a survey of more than 200 individuals who have substantial experience using the Istanbul Protocol in anti-torture activities. In addition to updating the six original chapters of the Istanbul Protocol, this edition includes two new chapters: chapter VII provides guidance on the role of health professionals in various contexts in which documentation may be necessary and chapter VIII provides guidance on the steps needed for effective implementation of the Istanbul Protocol by States.

The 2022 edition of the Istanbul Protocol will be made available in all six official United Nations languages on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)).

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