

# FAQ: Getting things done at the United Nations OHCHR

Version: un\_cat\_manual\_20240922

Many people are sending emails and letters to the United Nations and more specifically the OHCHR, The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They describe how they are tortured and ask for help, but nothing appears to happen.

This FAQ tries to explain how you must operate to get things done at the OHCHR, more specific, the Committee Against Torture (CAT), and what type of results you can expect. Be aware that it can take a long time, many years, to move things. On the other hand, if we do not tell them, they can not do anything.

I want to thank Tomo Shibata for being patient with me and providing me with a lot of information. This is a work in progress ...

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## 1 Introduction

Q What happens when I sent a letter with my story to the UN OHCHR?

A Nothing. Well, in fact, it probably will be archived.

Q How can I get things done at the UN OHCHR?

A You must follow the procedures from the Committee against Torture (CAT):

- They do Sessions a number of times a year.
- During a Session, the Committee will consider reports for a number of countries.
- Before the Session that includes your country, you must submit information in the proper format.
- During the Session you must present this information.

See below for more details.

Q What can be the result of my efforts?

A If your information is accepted, it will be added to the recommendations in the ‘Concluding observations’ on the report of your country. This information will be send to the relevant ministries or departments (Justice, Health, ...) of your country.

Q Can I do this as an individual?

A

Q Must my NGO be registered with the UN, OHCHR?

A

Q Are there also other ways to present my information?

A Yes, you can also call for a Thematic briefing during a Session. You propose some time, hours, which will be most likely be at the end of a Session.

The Committee of Torture decides if you can have this briefing.

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## 2 Navigation and finding information

Q How do I go the ‘Committee against Torture (CAT)’ page on the OHCHR website?

A To go to the ‘Committee against Torture (CAT)’ page:

- Browse to: <https://www.ohchr.org>
- From the top menu, select ‘Instruments & mechanisms’.
- In the dropdown menu select ‘Treaty bodies’.
- Scroll down on this page until you find ‘Committee against Torture (CAT)’.
- Click on ‘More information’.
- You should now be on the page: ‘Committee against Torture’.

The url of this page is: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cat>

Q How can I find the upcoming Session for my country?

A To find the upcoming Session for your country:  
Scroll down on the ‘Committee against Torture (CAT)’ page.

Q Where do I find information how this all works?

A On the page the ‘Committee against Torture (CAT)’, there is a link to:  
Fact Sheet No.17 on The Committee against Torture  
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet17en.pdf>

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### **3 About the Committee of Torture (CAT)**

Q What is the Committee of Torture (CAT)?

A The Committee of Torture consists of 10 persons, experts or members.  
The members are elected for a period of four years by the participating states.

Q What is the structure?

A Part of the 10 persons are:

- 1 Chairperson
- 3 Vice Chairpersons
- 1 Rapporteur

They are elected by the 10 persons of the Committee.

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### **4 About Sessions**

Q What is a Session?

A A Session  
Every day in a Session is 6 hours.

Q How do I know if my country is in an upcoming Session?

A

Q How many Sessions are there every year?

A There are 3-4 Sessions a year.

Q How long does a Session last?

A A Session lasts 3-4 weeks.

Q How can I find the agenda of a Session?

A A Provisional agenda' will be published with a Session.

## **5 Using a Session to present your information**

Q When do I present my information?

A You present your information during the Session when it's your State party's, your country's, turn. See the schedule of the Session.

Q How much time do I get to speak?

A The time you can speak is given to you by the Committee. Usually, you will not be able to read the full information you submitted. This means you must reduce your information into an 'oral statement' containing the most important information.

Q How does this all look like?

A Here is an example:

- The order of the NGOs is determined by the size (members?)
- The biggest NGO starts making its oral statement.
- Then the next biggest NGO, etc.
- After some time, you can make your oral statement.
- Then, the experts, the CAT members, may ask questions to the NGO representatives.
- Then all the NGOs answer these questions in the same order and the same time (?) as before.
- The Chairperson then says something like ‘if more things to discuss’ you can do it in the corridor / lobby.

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## **6 Using a Thematic briefing to present your information**

Q What is a Thematic briefing?

A You can request a Thematic briefing during a Session to present information that is not State-party (country) specific.

Q How does a Thematic briefing differ from a ‘normal’ State party Session?

A There is not much difference. You present your information, the experts listen, ask questions, and you answer their questions.

Q How do I request a Thematic briefing?

A You request a Thematic briefing by sending a ‘Concept Note’ to the Chairperson of the Committee Against Torture (CAT).

Q Who let’s me know if I can have this Thematic briefing?

A The Chairperson let’s you know. Typically, your Thematic briefing will be added at the end of a Session.

Q How should the ‘Concept note’ look like?

A You describe what you want to present, and optionally propose a schedule for different subjects (panels).

Q Do you have examples of ‘Concept notes’?

A Here are some examples:

- CONCEPT NOTE: Thematic briefing: Protecting women from violence through the UN Convention Against Torture  
10.00 am-1.00 pm & 3.00pm-5.45 pm, 4 December 2018  
Palais Wilson  
[https://www.omct.org/files/2018/11/25161/concept\\_note\\_thematic\\_briefing\\_vaw.pdf](https://www.omct.org/files/2018/11/25161/concept_note_thematic_briefing_vaw.pdf)
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