

The Special Fund of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (Special Fund)

Background

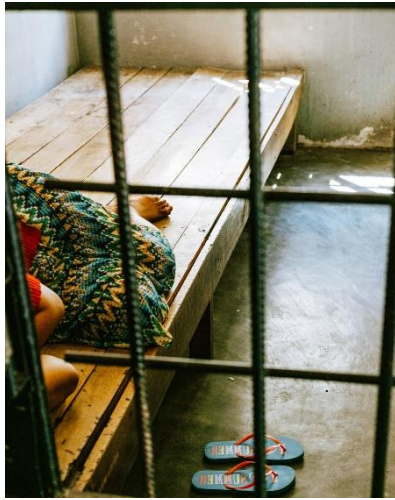


Photo credit: Ben Buckland, Association for Prevention of Torture. Special Fund project supporting the National Preventive Mechanism of Maldives with respect to treatment of female prisoners.

The Special Fund established by the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture presents a unique opportunity to further torture prevention. It is the only operational fund created by an international human rights treaty within the United Nations. Its support for national preventive mechanisms, the establishment of which is a core obligation under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, has been crucial in preventing torture worldwide.

The Special Fund provides grants to projects implementing recommendations from the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) on establishing or strengthening national preventive mechanisms (NPMs) in the States Parties to Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

The Fund's focus on NPMs helps significantly enhance sustainable torture prevention systems on the ground. National preventive mechanisms can drive genuine change at the domestic level, through their regular visits to places of detention, their reports and concrete recommendations, and legislative proposals. They foster systemic improvements at various levels: in laws, practices, policies, management and mindsets.

The Special Fund is administered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Facts and figures

14 grants were awarded for the 2024 project cycle in 12 eligible States (Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Gabon, Honduras, Mauritania, Mexico, Togo, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine and Uruguay) for a total of US\$ 384,063.

The projects which the Special Fund has supported have had a major impact in 32 countries of all regions through:

Legislative and policy changes, including adoption of the revised Code of Criminal Procedure in Benin, the Prison Act in Honduras, the law prohibiting abusive body search for persons deprived of their liberty in Brazil and draft law on establishing national preventive mechanisms in Benin and Gabon.

Institutional changes, such as the establishment of a registry of detainees in Paraguay, improved medico-legal examination form in hospitals in the Maldives and collaboration between national preventive mechanism and monitoring mechanism for persons with disabilities in Romania.

Since its establishment in 2011, the Special Fund has supported 134 torture prevention projects in 32 countries worldwide totalling US\$ 3.2 million.

Behavioural changes, such as the release of 49 remand detainees held without justification in Benin or reducing pre-trial detention through introducing camp court in prisons in Togo (42 cases finalised and 12 detainees released during two-day hearings).

Project supported by the Special Fund

Built capacity on torture prevention of above:

200 judges
800 police officers
70 health professionals
200 prison staff
130 representatives of authorities
members of more than 20 civil society organizations.

Developed torture prevention materials, including:

30,000 booklets
20,000 posters
500 guides
20,000 flyers
1,000 manuals,
including in a number of minority languages.



Photo credit: Ben Buckland, Association for Prevention of Torture. Special Fund project on decreasing pre-trial detention in Togo.

The Funds role

To support projects that address gaps and needs in torture prevention, identified by the Subcommittee on the ground. These projects are instrumental in implementing the Subcommittee's recommendations and in supporting establishment and effective functioning of national preventive mechanisms.

The Fund's mission



Photo credit: Avocat sans Frontières. Special Fund project in Mali supporting capacity building of the National Preventive Mechanism, judiciary and law enforcement to prevent torture.

To help finance the implementation of the recommendations made by the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture following a visit to a State party to the Optional Protocol, and to finance educational programmes of national preventive mechanisms.

The Special Fund uniquely links the recommendations of an independent expert committee to work on the ground.

Applications

The annual call for applications is open every year from 15 January to 1 March. Grants are awarded for a one-year period (1 January to 31 December) of the following year. The maximum amount of a grant is US\$ 30,000.

Applications may be submitted by State institutions of **States parties** to the Optional Protocol visited by the Subcommittee and their **national preventive mechanisms** that have agreed to the publication of the Subcommittee report. Applications may also be submitted by **national human rights institutions** compliant with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) and by **non-governmental organizations** if the proposed projects are to be implemented in cooperation with eligible States parties and/or national preventive mechanisms. Applications may also be submitted for support for educational programmes of **national preventive mechanisms**, regardless of the visit of the State party.

2024 Call for Applications [here](#)

How to support the Fund

The Special Fund relies entirely on voluntary contributions. Contributing to the Fund helps to prevent torture through tailored action on the ground, thus avoiding much higher human and financial costs of addressing and remedying potential abuses. The Special Fund can accept donations from Governments, inter-governmental organizations and private entities, including business companies, foundations, non-governmental organizations and individuals. Sustainable financial support and contributions continue to be necessary to be able to respond to applications received by the Special Fund.

The minimum annual resource needs amounts to US\$500,000. This enables the Fund to support up to 20 projects per year with a reasonable level of funding per project (approx. US\$25,000–US\$30,000) to address the needs of torture prevention on the ground and the increased demand from national preventive mechanisms and other actors in preventing torture.

For more information please click [here](#)

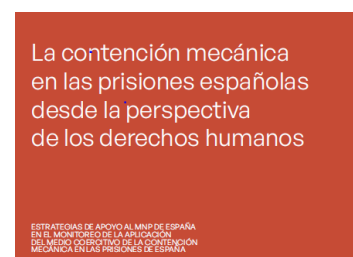
To find out more

Check of the Funds website [here](#)

Contact: ohchr-opcatfund@un.org



The UN Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement translated to Brazilian Portuguese supported by the Special Fund project (2022). Dissemination was accompanied by capacity-building of law enforcement.



Diciembre 2023

Observatorio del Sistema Penal y los Derechos Humanos de la Universidad de Barcelona



Report of the Special Fund project on the use of mechanical restraints in Spanish prisons (2023)