



**Promoting fair and  
effective criminal justice**

## **Penal Reform International Advocacy Strategy**

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### **Introduction**

The term “advocacy”, rooted in Latin, stands for the promotion of a cause or point of view. It is the act of pleading or arguing in favour of a cause, idea, or policy, aiming at influencing public-policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic and social systems and institutions. For PRI advocacy includes raising awareness, putting issues on the (political) agenda and proposing policy solutions.

PRI is an independent international human rights organisation seeking to achieve penal and criminal justice reform worldwide. Its mission is to promote international human rights standards and norms, and good governance, in cooperation and collaboration with governments, other officials and non-governmental partners.

Because of the non-confrontational way in which it works, PRI is able to achieve change in a politically sensitive environment. Its independence and specialized expertise makes it a valued partner for governments and civil society organisations and it has a reputation for staying the course in a field where progress can be slow and gradual. Its approach is gender and culturally sensitive, taking account of local conditions in its methodology.

### **How does PRI select its advocacy activities?**

PRI is a smaller organisation than many of its peer organisations championing the promotion and implementation of human rights. Given its capacity, but also its particular mission in the area of criminal justice, PRI selects its advocacy priorities based on the following considerations:

- PRI’s mission and strategic goals
- Added value of PRI as compared to other organisations
- Preparedness of respective governments to engage in reform
- Windows of opportunity/ windows for change
- Maximising resources

PRI’s mission is to achieve criminal justice reform worldwide, through the development and implementation of regional and international human rights instruments in relation to law

enforcement and prison conditions, and through the elimination of unfair and unethical discrimination in all penal measures.

PRI's thematic priorities with regard to penal reform are the following:

1. Reduction in the use of imprisonment throughout the world, including the use of constructive non-custodial sanctions which support the social reintegration of offenders whilst taking into account the interests of victims.
2. Prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
3. Abolition of the death penalty.
4. Incarceration of children as the last resort.
5. A proportionate and sensitive response to women offending.

PRI engages with criminal justice and other officials, without whose cooperation the process of reform is impossible and unsustainable. Due to its non-confrontational method of work, readiness of governments and authorities to engage in reform constitutes one of the preconditions for PRI's effective engagement at the national level.

PRI focuses on areas where, by its thematic and country expertise and by its working methods, its engagement has an added value. This means that the organisation will prioritise issues which receive little or no attention from other (international) organisations or on which other organisations are engaging in a different way than PRI.

Developments at national, regional and international level may provide a window of opportunity for reform on a particular issue in a particular country and/ or in a particular context.

At the national level, for example, review of legislation or practice, the establishment of bodies tasked with issues related to the criminal justice system or the preparation of state reports to regional or international human rights mechanisms may prompt PRI to convey its expertise and recommendations.

At the regional or international level, initiatives by human rights institutions, the schedule of human rights mechanisms, chairmanship of or candidacies for intergovernmental bodies such as Council of Europe, OSCE or the UN Human Rights Council may be factors encouraging PRI to engage at a certain point in time or with regard to a certain region.

Furthermore, PRI has got consultative and observer status with intergovernmental bodies (IGOs) such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which is also reflected in PRI's participation in meetings and processes of the respective institutions.

PRI seeks to maximise the use of its resources and therefore reflects on where its capacity, expertise and working methods are best invested. For example, in its choice of advocacy activities and priorities, the parallel engagement of local partners constitutes a crucial asset

in order for reform to be followed through and therefore, for PRI's engagement to be efficient and sustainable.

In some countries and contexts, the tool of advocacy will be the most promising gateway to reform, where in others, research, capacity building or assistance/ involvement in practical programmes at the national level may prove to be more useful.

## How does PRI engage in advocacy?

At the national level, PRI advocates for the recognition and implementation of regional and international human rights instruments in relation to law enforcement and prison conditions.

The organisation will:

- raise awareness of human rights treaties and other standards in human rights law, including authoritative and guiding interpretation of these standards and relating jurisprudence;
- disseminate information about human rights standards, adequate measures of implementation and good practice models;
- champion the ratification of human rights treaties;
- promote the enhancement and strengthening of monitoring mechanisms;
- call on governments to comply with their obligations under human rights law;
- analyse national legal and practical framework with regard to their compliance with human rights law;
- advise on the implementation of human rights standards; and
- promote good practice examples.

Within its advocacy activities at the regional and international level, PRI's advocacy activities involve:

- identifying gaps in existing standards and raising awareness about them;
- contributing to standard-setting initiatives;
- offering PRI's expertise and practical experience gathered in country projects and regional projects;
- drafting selected submissions to UN Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures, for the Universal Periodic Review;
- participating in meetings and sessions of intergovernmental bodies;
- cooperating with other civil society actors in networks and coalitions.

## PRI's interlocutors include:

**United Nations:** Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), General Assembly (UNGA), Human Rights Council (HRC), Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures relevant to PRI's mission, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), UN Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organisation (WHO).

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE):** Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM).

**African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights:** Sessions of the African Commission, Special Rapporteur on Prisons and Conditions of Detention in Africa, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Africa (CPTA), Working Group on Death Penalty in Africa.

**Council of Europe:** Committee of Ministers, Commissioner for Human Rights, European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), Council for Penological Co-operation (PC-CP), Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs, Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH), Committee of Experts for the Development of Human Rights (DH-DEV), European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), Directorate of Standard-Setting, Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and its Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (CLAHR).

**Institutions of the European Union:** European Parliament, European Commission, European External Action Service (EEAS), European Council, EU Delegations.

**League of Arab States** as for the Revised Arab Charter on Human Rights.

**Other institutions:** Inter-Parliamentary Union, Steering Committee of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, OPCAT Contact Group, Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice, other NGO-Coalitions and partners.

PRI also seeks to engage with and involve **(former) prisoners and penitentiary staff** in order to include their perspective.

## About PRI

**Penal Reform International (PRI)** is an independent non-governmental organisation that develops and promotes fair, effective and proportionate responses to criminal justice problems worldwide.

We currently have programmes in the Middle East and North Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, and work with partners in East Africa and South Asia.

To receive our monthly e-newsletter, please sign up at [www.penalreform.org/keep-informed](http://www.penalreform.org/keep-informed).