

**An outcomes evaluation of  
Penal Reform International's work on  
women in the criminal justice system at the  
international level between 2011-15**

[Executive summary](#)

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## Context and Purpose of the Evaluation

Up until 2010, relevant international standards included few gender-sensitive provisions, accounting for the specific background, characteristics and needs of female offenders or women prisoners. Addressing this gap, the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders ('Bangkok Rules') were adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2010. Penal Reform International (PRI) was involved in the work leading to the adoption of the Bangkok Rules and, with support from the UK Government (the Department for International Development), in their implementation since 2011 through a wide-ranging advocacy programme targeting three groups of 'multipliers':

- a. international institutions, including human rights bodies;
- b. civil society organisations (at international and national level);
- c. monitoring bodies (at international and national level).

Multipliers were targeted because their policies and actions are most likely to bring about change in others, thereby maximising PRI's impact. Specifically, PRI decided to work with UN and other international or regional bodies on the Bangkok Rules as these bodies interact with state interlocutors, thus supporting advocacy at the national level, allowing PRI to reach out to states beyond its regional presence. The mandates and activities of UN bodies targeted include country visits, country and thematic reports, as well as the consideration of individual cases.

PRI's grant from the UK Government to support the Bangkok Rules programme is due to end in April 2016. Although this evaluation is not required by the donor, PRI felt it was an opportune time to reflect on what has been achieved. To allow sufficiently rigorous evaluation, the scope was limited to the effects of international advocacy work done by PRI with UN Human Rights bodies and Special Procedures from the first category of multipliers (international institutions including human rights bodies) and the international detention monitoring mechanisms (third category).

Considering the context above, the purpose of the evaluation was defined with PRI as follows:

1. Make tacit knowledge of PRI staff explicit through the description of some of the most significant results at the level of outcomes of PRI's international-level activities in support of the Bangkok Rules
2. Understand the relative importance of PRI and other contributing factors to selected outcomes
3. Inform future work on the Bangkok Rules and other advocacy and technical support work
4. Serve as a resource for explaining the achievements of PRI's advocacy work internally and externally
5. Serve as a learning experience for PRI in understanding approaches to designing and monitoring advocacy and international technical support interventions

## Methodology

The evaluation assessed results at the level of outcomes defined in line with Outcome Mapping as: observable changes in the behaviour (relationships, policies, practices and actions) of individuals, groups, organisations or institutions that have been influenced directly in a small or large way by PRI's work on the Bangkok Rules at the international level.

The Outcome Harvesting tool was used to guide the identification, formulation, analysis and interpretation of outcomes. A limited number – six – of exemplar outcomes, one each from a sample of the UN bodies that PRI has targeted with its Bangkok Rules work, were described and subjected to

substantiation. The six were selected because a) each has a potentially significant influence on promoting implementation of the Bangkok Rules and b) PRI had evidence that they had been successful at helping to promote understanding within and action on the Bangkok Rules or issues for women in the criminal justice system by the UN body.

## Conclusions: Informant Perspectives

We had a high response rate to requests for interviews: 11 of the 13 people approached participated. This is a good response rate, particularly considering that each informant was a senior past or present employee of either a) UN bodies targeted by PRI advocacy or b) collaborating Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with intimate knowledge of PRI's Bangkok Rules advocacy. Leaving aside the content of the informant responses, the response rate itself is an indication that PRI is seen to be an important actor in the field and was sufficient to allow the evaluators to generate evaluation findings and draw conclusions.

Overall feedback was very positive. The majority of the informants saw PRI being the lead from the NGO sector on the Bangkok Rules. It was seen to have a unique role and a unique ability to draw on experience from the grassroots to the UN levels. PRI's strong collaborative approach and multi-dimensional work was seen very positively, as was its persistence. Informants provided several insights into how PRI's Bangkok Rules work has been useful and its relationship to the work of other actors:

- There is wide recognition that PRI is the leading NGO working on Bangkok Rules implementation with praise for its 'outstanding' and 'very valuable' work and 'leadership'
- The relevance of PRI's UN work was confirmed: it is undertaking often unique and highly regarded work; it is necessary to put Bangkok Rules on the agenda of UN bodies and UN bodies are important for catalysing action in national level monitoring bodies whose actions are needed to improve the realities of women in criminal justice. One informant put it like this:

*since the Bangkok Rules have been adopted and the need for work on the issue shifted to the need for a focus on implementation - a role which PRI has very successfully taken up...*

- Many find the multi-dimensional nature of PRI's work on the Bangkok Rules to be useful and practical, both for international institutions and those working in the field / domestically: technical reports / research; events; training; information resources such as PRI's Toolbox on the Bangkok Rules and information available through PRI's website on the Bangkok Rules were all mentioned
- PRI collaborates well, is supportive to other organisations and complements the efforts of other actors because it is focused on implementation more than policy advocacy. In the words of one informant:

*Without a doubt PRI was available and approachable when the training started. Very open minded in developing the necessary tools, e.g. translating it and supporting [...] member countries.*

- An important quality of PRI's UN work on the Bangkok Rules is that it is informed from the grassroots upwards
- PRI's consolidation and provision of information on the Bangkok Rules is of particular value; UN bodies have used / disseminated / referred to it internally and externally

- The breadth of PRI's UN work has been important to highlight how the Bangkok Rules apply to various agendas; this could usefully be extended further to other UN bodies
- The persistence of PRI's Bangkok Rules work has been important and further work at the UN level is needed to turn awareness into understanding and action more broadly in at least some institutions

## **Conclusions: Outcomes**

All six outcomes were confirmed to have materialised as described by PRI. They describe a range of changes among sampled UN bodies:

1. High-level promotion of the Bangkok Rules through events etc. (Outcomes 1, 2, 6)
2. Informing / training staff on the Bangkok Rules (Outcomes 2, 4)
3. Inviting / using expertise from PRI to inform agenda-setting reports (Outcomes 1, 5, 6)
4. Seeking training on the Bangkok Rules (Outcome 3)
5. Making commitments to work on the issue of women in criminal justice (Outcomes 3, 5)

The above variation in the extent to which actors have been influenced is not unexpected because some organisations will be more readily engaged than others and mainstreaming international standards or norms takes time. In part, the variation may reflect the differing mandates of the UN bodies: the actions that may be desired to effectively mainstream the Bangkok Rules in one UN body may not be the same as in the next – not all organisations may need to train staff, for instance. Nonetheless, evidence from informants suggests that even five years since the adoption of the Bangkok Rules by the UN, the need for further sensitisation to generate political will and action in some UN bodies' remains and therefore PRI has further work to do in this area.

## **Conclusions: PRI contribution to the outcomes**

PRI made crucial contributions to the outcomes: in each case, its actions were the principal factor influencing change in the UN body. The diversity of strategies is key to PRI's successes: no strategy alone would have realised the outcomes:

1. The production and dissemination of information resources (e.g. PRI's Toolbox on the UN Bangkok Rules, research reports, 'A short guide on the UN Bangkok Rules', training materials and other various resources including reports and guides).
2. Using the information resources and expert knowledge to make key people aware of the Bangkok Rules and how to implement them, in meetings (Outcomes 1, 2, 5, 6), convening events (Outcomes 3, 5, 6), participating in events (Outcome 4)
3. Delivering training (Outcome 4)
4. Written submissions to UN reports etc. / strategic fora (Outcomes 1, 5, 6)
5. Working with champions - actors with political weight at the UN level who are willing to advocate the Bangkok Rules agenda (Outcome 3)

## Programme learning

Informants identified a number of activities and resources that could usefully be continued, extended or strengthened:

- PRI's online course, 'Women in Detention: putting the Bangkok Rules into practice' has proven to be a very useful tool – It has been used as part of the pre-deployment training by the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO). A number of stakeholders interviewed mentioned how the course gave an overview of the issues and thus was very helpful. It was even suggested that, at international and national levels, those dealing with or responsible for women in the criminal justice system should be required to take this online course. As there is a demand for the online course, PRI might consider if they want to develop it further, by exploring the production of 1) A shorter course to provide a quicker overview of the Bangkok Rules and issues for women in the criminal justice system; and/or 2. A version(s) of the course, perhaps requiring payment, for stakeholders with greater detail in specific areas.
- Guides and tools on the website – The website is the natural place for people to turn to or be guided to when they want to find out more about PRI's overall work and more specifically work on the Bangkok Rules. Resources PRI provides online to support use of the Bangkok Rules are well regarded; PRI's 'Toolbox on the UN Bangkok Rules', for instance, is seen to be very user friendly and helpful. We note that guidance on the Bangkok Rules is not currently found on the PRI Homepage. Instead, users will find guidance and tools under the 'Women in the criminal Justice System' theme of either 'Our Priorities' or 'Resources' sections of the PRI Website. Given the range of work PRI is engaged in, this may be appropriate – further investigation of user experiences would be needed to confirm. But given the responses from some of our informants, some reflection on the profile of the Bangkok Rules guidance resources may be appropriate.
- Side events facilitated by PRI – The side events organised by PRI at UN meetings, collaboratively with other partners or just by themselves, included audiences representing cross section of groups and organisations and has given people the opportunity to find out more about the Bangkok Rules in an open and relaxed environment. The events were seen to be informative and helpful. This ability to translate and present an important and difficult subject in a very accessible manner and engage a wide-ranging audience has been successful, therefore consideration should be given to continuing use of this strategy.
- The Summer School – 'Summer School for National Preventative Mechanisms (national prison monitoring bodies) on preventing torture through gender-sensitive monitoring' was held in August 2015 at Bristol University in collaboration with the Association of the Prevention of Torture (APT). The course was mentioned by most of the informants interviewed for the evaluation. It was seen as having been a space to get refreshed on the subject and time to concentrate on the issues alongside others. It was felt that further such courses would be a helpful way to get those on the ground involved in the issue and gain understanding of how to implement the Bangkok Rules. It is also possible that such courses and side-events at the UN can be further used to bring together people not directly involved in the issue with those who are, e.g. those who work with children in the criminal justice system or on health.
- A half-day workshop on the Bangkok Rules should be provided for detention monitoring bodies at the European level – This suggestion referred to the workshop lead by PRI for members of the three torture-prevention bodies at the UN (the Committee Against Torture, the Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture and the Special Rapporteur on Torture) on the Bangkok Rules. A

similar workshop with equivalent bodies in Europe was felt to be a good way to reach a wider audience.

- Use PRI's Toolbox on the UN Bangkok Rules to extend engagement with other Special Rapporteurs in order to integrate the Bangkok Rules into their thematic issues – PRI already takes active steps to integrate and promote the issue of women in the criminal justice system in different themes. There are Special Procedures, including Rapporteurs, in other areas of work and it would be logical to extend awareness on the subject to these bodies; consideration should be given to the feasibility and prioritisation of such an extension of PRI's reach.
- PRI's monitoring of its international advocacy on the Bangkok Rules together with this evaluation could be used to inform a wider evaluation of all strategies used in PRI's Bangkok Rules Theory of Change, including tracking forwards from known outcomes to explore if national level actors have been influenced by international level outcomes and the extent to which PRI has contributed to these higher-level results.

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