



PATHWAY TO FREEDOM: HANDBOOK FOR THE LIBERATION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS



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Co-Founders: Masih Alinejad, Leopoldo López and Garry Kasparov

**Pathway to Freedom:
Handbook for the Liberation of Political Prisoners**

Director: Lilian Tintori

Writers: Génesis Dávila and Marian Da Silva

Project Assistant: Aisha Catena

Communications Advisors: Berta Valle and Antonieta Mendoza

Legal Advisors: Juan Carlos Gutiérrez, Jared Genser, and Javier Cremades

Content Consultants: Carine Kanimba, Anaïse Umubyeyi Kanimba and Victor Navarro

Translation: Nicolás Sagobal and Karena Halvorssen

Partners: Defiende Venezuela, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights and Axel Springer Freedom Foundation

Design and Illustrations: Sandra Natasadu Grafik | Werbung | Design, Hamburg, and Carina Dylus

Contributions: Alejandra Serrate, Alejandra Llamas, Alfredo Jimeno, Angelita Baeyens, Andrés Pizarro, Andrei Sannikov, Brandon Silver, Carmen Lau, Carmen Ladrón de Guevara, Carolina Ribera Añez, Carlos Briceño, Diing Mou Aguer, Enrique Martínez, Erik Jennische, Evgenia Kara-Murza, Félix Madariaga, Gilber Caro, Gustavo Tovar, Harold Miñarro, Iliana Hernández, Javier El-Hage, Jianli Yang, Luisa Elena Vidaurre, Luisana Mancipe, Luis Carlos Díaz, Mardi Seng, Mu, Nabhan Al Hanshi, Omar Alshogre, Rafael Uzcategui, Rodrigo Diamanti, Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Sardar Pashaei, Simón Gómez Guaimara, Yunova Acosta and Zvonko Matkovic.



This book
is dedicated to
all Political Prisoners,
to their families, and to those
who accompany them
on their pathway
to freedom.



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FOREWORD



If you are reading this, you may feel that it is already too late. Perhaps you or someone you love has been arbitrarily deprived of their freedom, or you fear it may happen. You may feel alone, believing that you are the only one facing this situation. But you are not alone. Political imprisonments are a tool commonly used by autocracies to repress dissent and stay in power. Throughout history, from the dungeons of the Pinochet regime in Chile to the prisons filled with dissidents in contemporary China, the voices of those who dare to oppose power have been silenced. But in every dark corner where freedom has been shackled, resistance and solidarity have flourished.

This handbook is not just a guide, but a universal tool that arises from a commitment to human dignity, justice, and freedom. Here, we will share best practices identified directly from the experience of political prisoners, family members, lawyers, representatives of civil society organizations, international organizations, government officials, psychologists, and other experts. Although each struggle is unique, the principles and strategies presented are universal and can be adapted to any context.

Throughout this process, you will face crucial decisions. The first will be to decide whether you will speak publicly about the case or opt for silence. Regimes often try to negotiate freedom in exchange for silence, but this is often a trap. Speaking publicly can offer protection to the victim. If you choose to speak out, this handbook will guide you through each step of the process. If you choose to be silent and follow the regime's instructions, then this handbook will not help.

This book is a call for organized resistance, disciplined action, and a commitment to justice and democracy. It promotes non-violence and the transformative power of peaceful civil resistance. While we cannot guarantee success, we seek to provide you with the tools necessary to give you a head start on the pathway to freedom.

May this book serve as a testament to human resilience in the face of injustice. May it inspire, strengthen, and provide a path to effective action and real change. And above all, may it leave a lasting legacy of peaceful resistance and liberation in every corner of the world.







Chapter 1

UNDERSTANDING DETENTION FOR POLITICAL REASONS

Politically motivated detentions are a tactic used by governments and authoritarian entities to suppress dissent and maintain control. Since time immemorial, those who have questioned power have risked imprisonment, or worse, disappearance. History is full of such examples and this dark reality persists in many regions of the world to this day.

Politically motivated detentions are often the result of ambiguous or overly broad laws and policies that allow governments to detain and imprison individuals based on their political opinions or beliefs. These detentions often occur without due process and are sometimes accompanied by torture or ill-treatment.

History and Context

Detentions for political reasons are not a recent invention; in fact, they have deep roots in human history. A few examples illustrate how detentions for political reasons go back to the very existence of power. Socrates in ancient Athens was detained and sentenced to death in 399 BC¹ for boldly questioning the established beliefs and norms of his society. Galileo Galilei in the 17th century was forced to live the rest of his life under house arrest by the Catholic Church because of his unwavering defense of the heliocentric theory, which asserted that the Earth orbited around the Sun.²

This trend persists in modern times. Throughout different eras and cultures, authorities have employed prison as a ruthless instrument to silence those who dare to challenge the established order. From the dark days of Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union,³ through the tumultuous Cultural Revolution in China⁴ to the Castro dictatorships in Cuba⁵ and the mass detentions of women's rights activists in Iran,⁶ – the pattern emerges clear and undeniable.

¹ Ramis, J. 2005. Reflections On The Political Background In The Trial Against Socrates.

² McMullin, E. 2007. The Case for Galileo. Faraday Institute for Science and Religion.

³ The Stalin regime in the Soviet Union refers to the period of rule led by Joseph Stalin from the 1920s until his death in 1953. During this time, Stalin implemented repressive policies, mass executions, political purges and the creation of forced labor camps known as "gulags". These actions led to the persecution and detention of political opponents, intellectuals and citizens in general. Ferrary, A. 2006. The reason for terror: Hitler and Stalin.

⁴ The Cultural Revolution in China was a political and social movement launched by Mao Zedong in the 1960s. During this period, class struggle and the suppression of any form of ideological dissent were promoted. Thousands of intellectuals, artists and people considered "counter-revolutionary" were persecuted, arrested or forced into hard labor.

⁵ Castro dictatorships in Cuba refer to the regime led by Fidel Castro and his brother Raul Castro since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. For decades, up to the present, politically motivated detentions, repression of freedom of expression and limitation of civil rights have been carried out in Cuba. Including the detention of political opponents and dissidents.

⁶ The mass detentions of women's rights activists in Iran refer to actions taken by the Iranian government in response to protests and activities by women fighting for their rights in the country. These detentions have been widely documented by human rights organizations and have occurred in response to participation in protests and activities related to gender equality in Iran.

These examples, both ancient and contemporary, are a vivid reminder that power, when it feels threatened, can go to disturbing lengths to silence dissenting voices, regardless of time or place in history.

The Changing Face of Political Detention

Detention for political reasons has evolved over time, and its face has changed with shifting geopolitical circumstances. Whereas in the past, detention for political reasons was often associated with dictatorships and authoritarian regimes,⁷ It now also occurs in countries that call themselves democratic.⁸

Often, politically motivated detentions are masked by charges of common crimes. For example, in Russia, several opponents of Putin's government have been charged with corruption in cases that many international observers believe were fabricated to silence critics of the Kremlin.⁹

In Nicaragua, during the run-up to the 2021 general elections, several presidential candidates and opposition figures to the Ortega government were detained under various criminal charges,¹⁰ including conspiracy to undermine national integrity, treason or money laundering. These detentions are seen as an attempt to suppress political competition.

In addition, anti-terrorism laws are used to imprison dissidents, labeling them as threats to national security. A notorious case is that of Venezuela under the regime of Nicolás Maduro. There, the Law against Organized Crime and Financing of Terrorism and the Law against Hatred, for

⁷ 72% of the world's population, 5.7 billion people, live in autocracies in 2022. V-Dem Institute. Democracy Report 2023: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization.

⁸ Freedom House's State of Democracy 2022 report highlights a disturbing trend of continued decline in global freedom for the 17th consecutive year. Despite a year in which the gap between improving and declining countries narrowed, this persistent decline underscores the challenges facing democracy and human rights around the world.

⁹ Freedom House. Russia: Country Report 2022.
Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2022>

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch. World Report 2022: Nicaragua.
Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/es/world-report/2022/country-chapters/nicaragua>

Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance usually have been applied to justify the detention of journalists, activists and members of the opposition on charges of “promoting terrorism”.¹¹

Clearing Doubts: Questions and Answers

- **What is a political prisoner?**

A political prisoner is an individual who has been detained by the authorities because of their political beliefs, expressions or activities that challenge or criticize the governmental status quo. This detention, often without due process, reflects an attempt to silence dissenting voices and suppress political opposition, constituting a serious violation of human rights and democratic principles.¹²

- **Is a political prisoner the same as an imprisoned politician?**

No, a political prisoner and an imprisoned politician represent different categories of detainees. While a political prisoner is detained for their political beliefs or activities, an imprisoned politician is a figure with a formal political role who has been detained on criminal charges that may or may not be related to their political activity.

- **What is the difference between a political and non-political prisoner?**

A political prisoner is detained for political reasons, while a common prisoner is detained for violations of criminal laws unrelated to political motivations. The detention of common prisoners follows due process of law and responds to recognized criminal acts, while the detention of political prisoners reflects an instrumentalization of the judicial system for political ends.

¹¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Venezuela: UN experts condemn the use of anti-terrorism laws to convict trade unionists and union leaders. August 11, 2023.

Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2023/08/venezuela-un-experts-condemn-use-counter-terrorism-laws-convict-trade>

¹² Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The definition of a political prisoner. Available at: <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?-fileid=19150&lang=en>

- **Are all political prisoners prisoners of conscience?**

Not necessarily. While a political prisoner is detained because of their political beliefs or activities that challenge or criticize the governmental status quo, a prisoner of conscience is someone detained solely because of their beliefs, identity, or moral integrity, without having resorted to or advocated for violence.¹³ Although all prisoners of conscience could be considered political prisoners in a broad sense, not all political prisoners are necessarily prisoners of conscience, especially if they have advocated or participated in violent actions.

- **What is arbitrary detention?**

Arbitrary detention occurs when an individual is detained without adequate legal safeguards or in violation of fundamental human rights. This form of detention is a manifestation of injustice and repression, and reflects a serious deviation from the principles of the rule of law and justice.¹⁴

- **What is political detention?**

Detention for political reasons is a tactic employed by authoritarian regimes to silence and neutralize individuals or groups that challenge or criticize the established power. This form of detention

¹³ Amnesty International - What is a prisoner of conscience? February 16, 2019. Available at: <https://www.amnistia.org/ve/blog/2019/02/9334/que-es-un-preso-de-conciencia>

¹⁴ According to the Working Methods of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) arbitrary detentions are classified as: (i) When it is obviously impossible to invoke any legal basis to justify it (such as keeping a person in detention after having served his sentence or despite an amnesty law applicable to him) (category I);(ii) When the deprivation of liberty results from the exercise of rights or freedoms proclaimed in articles 7, 13, 14, 14, 18, 19, 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, in addition, with respect to States parties, in articles 12, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (category II);(iii) When the failure to observe, in whole or in part, the international standards relating to the right to a fair trial, as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the relevant international instruments accepted by the States concerned, is of such gravity as to confer on the deprivation of liberty an arbitrary character (category III);(v) When the deprivation of liberty constitutes a violation of international law on grounds of discrimination based on birth, national, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, economic status, political or other opinion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other status, and is intended to disregard equal human rights or is likely to cause such a result (category V).

reveals an instrumentalization of the judicial system for political purposes, undermining justice and democracy.

- **Can detention for political reasons be arbitrary?**

Yes, a politically motivated detention can be arbitrary, especially when it is carried out without due process of law or in violation of fundamental human rights. This combination of arbitrariness and political motivation in detention reflects a serious violation of democratic principles and justice, and requires a determined and strategic response from civil society and the international community. However, not all arbitrary detentions are politically motivated, as they can occur for a variety of reasons, such as discrimination, corruption, judicial inefficiency, or administrative errors.

This chapter has served to provide an overview of what political detention entails and how it has evolved throughout history. We have cleared up doubts and clarified key concepts related to this topic. Now that we have understood the nature of political detention, it is time to dive into the substitute for this: their identification and documentation.

My personal notes





Chapter 2

IDENTIFICATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF POLITICAL DETENTION

Political detentions are often carried out without transparency, so the first steps toward the release of the detainees are the accurate identification of the situation and its meticulous documentation. Remember that the first hours after detention are of the utmost importance. You must act with a sense of urgency as it is during this time that the victim is most vulnerable to abuse by the authorities responsible for the detention. Thus, it is of critical importance to document every detail of the detention from the moment it happens, including the place, time, perpetrators and whereabouts of the detainee if known or the declaration of their enforced disappearance if unknown.

Meticulous documentation not only confirms the detention, but also provides a solid basis for challenging its legality in future litigation and awareness campaigns. This task, while essential, must be executed with discretion and security, protecting the identity of the individuals in-

volved and ensuring the integrity of the information collected. Below we will delve into practical tips for identifying and documenting the detention of your loved one.

Confirmation of the Detention

If you did not witness the detention, the first thing to do is to confirm that the detention occurred. This may involve contacting friends, family, neighbors, members of political or social organizations, lawyers and human rights defenders. In some cases, the authorities may deny the detention, so it is important to obtain independent information when possible.

Importance of the Detention's Publicity

The first 72 hours after the detention are vitally important, as it is often during this period when victims are subjected to multiple human rights violations, such as failure to appear in court, enforced disappearances, torture and other serious abuses. This is when the pressing questions pile up: What action should I take? How should I react to the detention? Is it appropriate to speak out or should I remain silent? Should the case be brought into the public sphere or handled discreetly? It is crucial to properly address these questions because the decisions you make will guide the path to freedom.

As soon as your loved one is detained, the most important decision that you will have to make is whether to make the detention public. During these first hours you will be presented with two options: private and discreet negotiation or a public campaign. Private negotiation involves using confidential communication channels to negotiate with the authorities to try to reach agreements away from public attention. Public campaigning, on the other hand, involves exposing the illegality of the detention and human rights violations to put pressure on the authorities. It is important to understand, that despite deciding to publicize the detention within this timeframe, there will always be the opportunity later to decide whether the negotiation process will remain public or private.

separation of powers, making the case visible to public opinion may be not only necessary, but imperative. This decision is not simply a strategy, but an act of courage and resistance in itself. When a case becomes a matter of public interest, authorities face more rigorous scrutiny. This includes increased visibility that triggers a mobilization of support that could transcend borders, uniting civil society and the international community. It also brings pressure on authorities, as they must address public concerns seriously, aware that their actions are being observed and evaluated. In addition, government officials may face both political and legal consequences for their acts of abuse or violation of human rights, which may not only lead them to reconsider their actions, but also set a significant precedent.

It is important to understand that only if you decide to raise the profile of your loved one – allowing their case to be publicly known – will you then be able to access the wide range of tools and resources that this handbook has to offer in building your liberation strategy. Visibility and public awareness are the foundation upon which the effectiveness of the actions you undertake in this challenge are built.

Detention Documentation

Once the detention is confirmed, you should gather as much information as possible about the circumstances of the detention. Remember that accuracy and detail are essential here. If any information is missing, it is important to indicate this. Any erroneous information can damage the credibility of the case.

Some key questions to consider may be: Who made the detention? When and where did the detention take place? Were there witnesses? Was any justification provided for the detention? Was any legal process followed? Were there violence or threats?

Determining the Detainee's Location

After understanding the circumstances of the detention, it is vital to determine the whereabouts of the detainee. If the detainee cannot be located, it could be an enforced disappearance. Enforced disappear-

ances occur when authorities conceal the whereabouts of detainees, denying their detention or withholding information about their location, which is a serious human rights violation.

Although obtaining this information can be complicated, it is crucial to make every effort to locate the detainee. This includes inquiring with local authorities, making calls or visiting detention centers. As unsettling as it may be, it is also necessary to visit hospitals and morgues. If the detainee's location is unable to be determined, it is essential to report them missing.

Gathering Evidence of Detention

The collection of tangible evidence is a fundamental pillar in the process of documenting a politically motivated detention. Elements such as testimonies, videos and photographs not only serve as reliable records of the event but also complement and strengthen the narrative, providing a solid base of irrefutable evidence. This evidence can be crucial in confirming the detention, challenging the legality of the detention and raising awareness of the case in question.

Continuous Monitoring

The situation of a political detainee can change rapidly, so it is important to follow any developments closely. This includes changes in their legal status, health, location and any communication they may have with the outside world. You should also be on the lookout for acts of harassment against family members or allies. Keep documentation updated with any changes that occur.

Logbook

We suggest keeping a detailed log to record all events and actions related to the political prisoner's situation. This log should include everything from details of the detention to updates on the conditions of confinement, including the different stages of the legal process, meetings with government authorities, acts of harassment or persecution against their family members or work team and any public pronouncements by the

authorities in relation to their case. You may include any other facts you consider significant.

The log will be an essential tool in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the release strategy, and will help guide narrative, communications, mobilization activities and litigation. Securely store the log information and have a backup of the log. The value of the log will become evident in the next chapters.

Secure Registration

It is vital to store all case-related information and data securely. When dealing with digitized information, consider using encrypted media, and always keep in mind the possibility of surveillance or hacking. If physical material is involved, it may be useful to distribute copies of the information in various secure locations to have backups and avoid loss.

Technical and Legal Support

Seek immediate support from a lawyer or human rights organization to help you protect the rights of the political prisoner during these first hours and to assist you in creating a comprehensive strategy for release. In the following chapters we will go into more detail on this topic.

Example

Let's consider the case of Paul Rusesabagina, a prominent human rights activist in Rwanda, and the vital role played by his daughters, Carine Kanimba and Anaïse Kanimba, in advocating for his rights. Rusesabagina became known for his courageous actions as the manager of the Hôtel des Mille Collines in Kigali during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, where he protected more than a thousand refugees from extreme violence. However, in 2020, Rusesabagina was forcibly disappeared and detained in Rwanda on alleged terrorism charges.

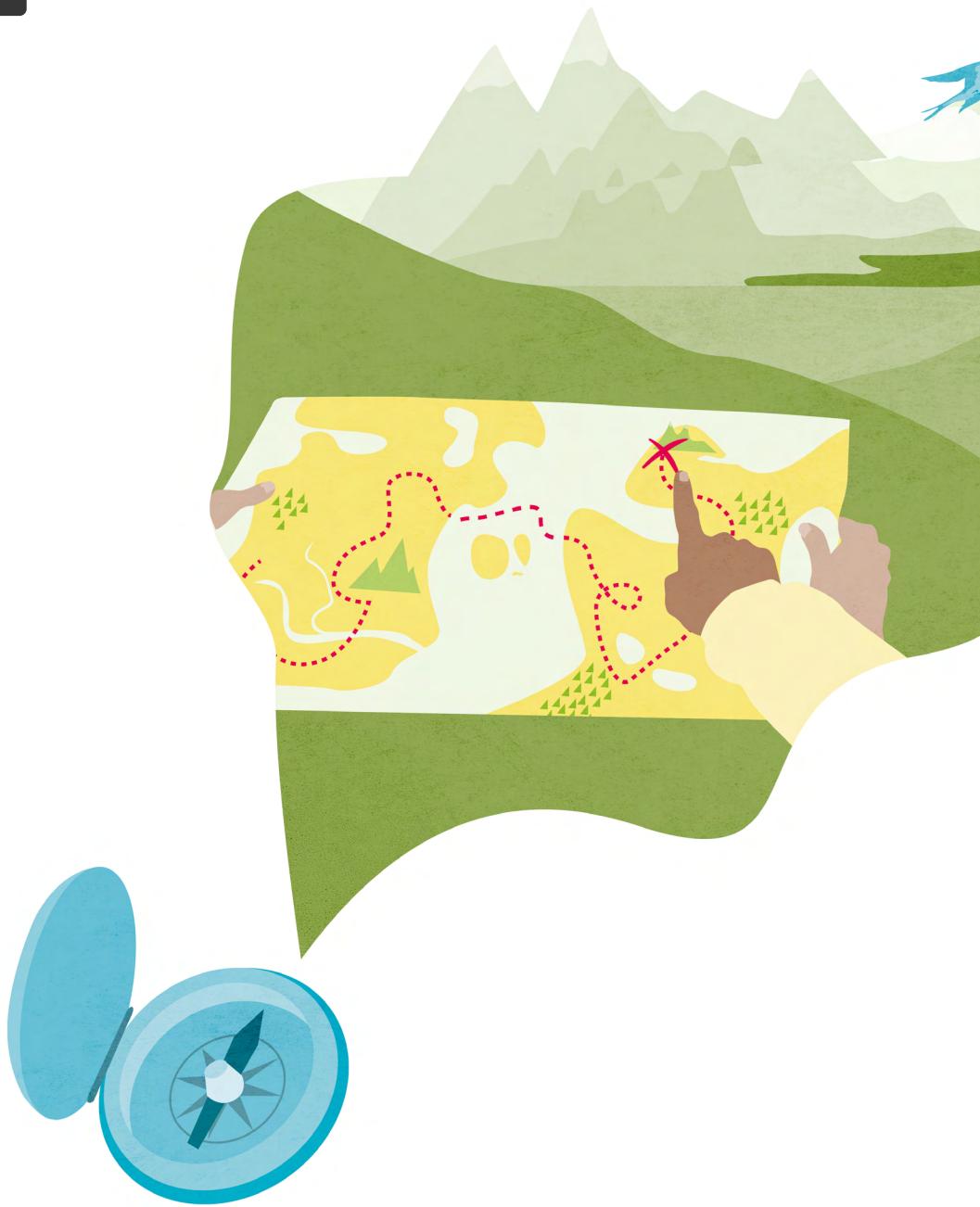
Under these circumstances, his daughters, Carine and Anaïse, played a crucial role in documenting and making public all the details of his detention from the moment he was forcibly disappeared. The information gathered was shared with various human rights organizations and international working groups. Press conferences were held to keep the media and leaders around the world informed about Paul Rusesabagina's detention conditions.

Furthermore, collaboration took place with a number of organizations and institutions, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), the American Bar Association, the International Bar Association, the Clooney Foundation for Justice, the European Parliament, and the United States Congress, with the aim of formalizing and documenting his detention according to international human rights standards. In 2023, after spending two years in prison, Paul Rusesabagina was freed.

Paul Rusesabagina's story is a powerful reminder of how identifying and documenting political detentions becomes the foundation of any effort to defend the rights of detainees and fight oppression. Accuracy in information gathering is essential to ensure that the truth prevails and to build a solid foundation for future legal action and awareness campaigns.

In the next chapter we will delve into the creation of a comprehensive strategy to free political prisoners. A well-organized and planned strategy can make the difference between impunity and the release of an unjustly detained individual. A suitable strategy will bring us closer to the materialization of the main goal: freeing political prisoners. Together, we will work to challenge oppressive power structures and create a world where dignity and justice are respected for all.

My personal notes



A stylized illustration in the top left corner depicts a landscape with rolling green hills. In the sky above the hills, several blue birds are shown in flight against a light green background with white cloud shapes.

Chapter 3

BUILDING A LIBERATION STRATEGY

Once a person has been detained for political reasons, a challenging and uncertain journey begins. In prior chapters, you have grasped the nature of detention and gained the knowledge needed to document it. Now, it is time to move forward and develop a comprehensive strategy that can guide you to freedom.

This strategy is divided into three fundamental areas, each with its own vital importance and relevance. First, you will focus on providing support and stability to both the political prisoner and yourself. Political detentions can be emotionally overwhelming, and it is important to ensure that both you and the political prisoner can cope with this process in the best possible way. In addition, you will build a strong support network that will accompany you in the execution of your strategy.

Second, you will address communication strategy management. In cases where detention occurs unlawfully, gaining public attention becomes essential. You will learn how to develop an effective narrative that highlights the injustice of detention and how to conduct awareness campaigns to mobilize the necessary support.

Third, you will immerse yourself in national and international litigation and advocacy. Challenging the legality of detention and seeking justice are crucial steps in your strategy. You will learn how to activate legal resources, work with lawyers, experts, and international human rights bodies.

Your ultimate goal is to achieve the release of the political detainee. For this, it is fundamental to understand that these three areas in your strategy do not necessarily follow a specific order. They should generally be carried out simultaneously and always in a complementary manner to create a harmonious release strategy. In the following chapters, you will receive detailed guidance on how to develop your strategy.

Here are some general tips to help you prepare your release strategy in a comprehensive way that is tailored to your specific situation.

General Tips

- **Setting Goals**

It is wise to establish goals that enable you to track the progress of your release strategy. These goals will give you a sense of direction towards justice and freedom. Focus your goals on the three fundamental areas of creating a comprehensive liberation strategy: accompaniment, communications, and litigation and advocacy.

- **Assessing the Environment**

Research and understand the environment you are in. Who is involved in the detention? What motivations might they have for the detention? What motivations might they have for the release? What is the general political situation like in your country? What laws or policies might influence the case? This analysis will help you identify

opportunities and threats to your strategy and give you a better perspective on how to move forward.

- **Resource Evaluation**

It is crucial that when building and executing your release strategy, you assess the resources at your disposal. These resources may include people, funding, time, knowledge, skills and communication channels. Determine how to obtain and use these resources most effectively to achieve your goals. For example, if you have a contact at a major media outlet, that resource could be invaluable in raising public awareness of the case.

- **Managing Relations with Public Authorities**

Stay resolute and prioritize the political prisoner's release when engaging with public authorities. Maintain a pragmatic view of the authorities' intentions and carefully strategize your communication. Keep a detailed record of all interactions. Adaptability and international support can prove invaluable in this endeavor. You can find more details on how to manage relations with public authorities in Chapter 10.

- **Security Protocol**

Within the political prisoner release strategy, it is imperative that you have a solid security protocol that safeguards the integrity of everyone involved in the release campaign. Understanding the potential sources of danger is the first step in developing effective prevention and response strategies, as well as addressing and mitigating potential threats and risks that may arise during the process.

- **Evaluation and Adjustment**

Last but not least, you should plan to evaluate your strategy and be ready to modify it as many times as necessary. The environment may change, you may face unexpected obstacles, or you may encounter new opportunities. By reviewing and adjusting your strategy regularly, make sure that you are following the most effective path to secure the detainee's release.

Example

The case of the Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov, exemplifies the effectiveness of a well-planned strategy and a committed support network in freeing a detainee in a challenging environment. When Oleg Sentsov was detained in 2014 by the Russian government for political reasons, his support network in devising the strategy, set clear goals: raising global awareness, gaining international political backing, and presenting his case to international bodies.

Thus, they implemented actions such as campaigns on social networks, protests in front of Russian embassies and meetings with European and American politicians, pressuring them to speak out against Oleg's unjust detention and demand his release. At the same time, human rights lawyers worked on the preparation of a legal complaint to be filed with the European Court of Human Rights, seeking justice through international bodies. In 2018, Oleg won the Sakharov prize for freedom of thought.

Finally, in 2019, after five years of detention, Oleg Sentsov was released as a result of the tireless struggle and coordinated action of his support network, which kept international attention focused on his case. His story vividly illustrates how meticulous strategy, a committed support network, and careful adaptability can achieve the release of an imprisoned human rights activist, even in a challenging environment such as Russia.

Thus, in this chapter we have outlined the path to liberation through the construction of a solid and effective strategy. This strategy will be your flexible roadmap, which will be adapted to the particularities of each case. We have understood the importance of setting clear goals, assessing our resources, analyzing the environment and developing concrete actions that will lead us to the detainee's release. In the following chapters we will explore the key components of this strategy, providing practical examples for a deeper understanding. We will also provide you with the tools necessary to make decisions at each stage of this journey toward justice and freedom.

My personal notes



Chapter 4

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT IN THE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

The struggle for the release of a political prisoner is both an emotional and a strategic battle, and requires deep and multidimensional support and companionship.

First, there is the political prisoner, whose physical and mental well-being can be severely affected by the conditions of their detention. His resistance and resilience are essential, but he must not face this struggle alone. Adequate support and accompaniment can be the difference between despair and hope, between isolation and connection to the outside world.

Additionally, there are also the political prisoner's loved ones, who, although physically free, face their own emotional and logistical imprisonment. The uncertainty, fear and frustration can be overwhelming. However, with the right tools and strategies, they can become effective

advocates, keeping the flame of hope alive while working tirelessly for their loved one's release.

This chapter will delve into the heart of these two dimensions of support. Through practical advice, reflections and strategies, we will seek to provide a framework for those who wish to offer genuine and effective support on the path to liberation.

The Political Prisoner: Challenges and Needs

Political prisoners are often subjected to harsher and more punitive prison conditions than other inmates. These conditions can range from solitary confinement, physical and emotional torture, to the deprivation of fundamental rights. Beyond the physical harm, being imprisoned for ideological convictions carries profound emotional and psychological trauma. It is therefore crucial to identify and understand the realities or circumstances, as well as the primary challenges they face:

- 1. Fear of Oblivion:** The greatest fear of a political prisoner is to be forgotten. This fear refers not only to the concern that their names will disappear from public memory, but also to the fear that they may be abandoned in prison, with no hope of release or justice.
- 2. Uncertainty:** From the moment of their detention, political prisoners are plunged into an uncertain future. Each day becomes a constant reminder of their lack of autonomy over their own destiny. The uncertainty of when, or even if, they will be released and be able to resume their lives is a constant burden.
- 3. Emotional and Psychological Burden:** Being imprisoned for political beliefs carries an intense emotional and psychological burden. The constant pressure of deprivation of liberty, combined with the uncertainty and awareness of being punished for political reasons, can result in an overwhelming sense of injustice.
- 4. Perception of Time:** Each political prisoner experiences time in prison differently, largely influenced by their specific conditions of

detention. For some, overcrowding makes each day a struggle, while for others, solitary confinement can distort their perception of time.

5. Detention Conditions: Prison conditions faced by political prisoners are characterized by extreme hardship. These could include lack of access to adequate food, overcrowded or isolated conditions, insufficient clothing, shortage of hygiene products, poor medical care, and subjection to torture or cruel and inhumane treatment which aggravates their situation.

In the face of these challenges, it is essential to explore support tactics for the political prisoner that are designed to counteract such circumstances and also provide strong support in times of crisis. The goal is to illuminate the path to freedom and justice.

Strategies for the Well-being of the Political Prisoner

1. Importance of the First Visit: The first hours and days following the detention of a political prisoner are critical moments that require special attention. At this stage, it is essential that the prisoner knows that they are not alone and that there is a support team working tirelessly for their release. During the first visit you must remember the need to convey a message of hope and solidarity, reaffirming that they are not alone in this struggle. It is essential that this communication is encouraging and hopeful, highlighting the concrete steps that are being taken to achieve their release. Emotional support during this period can make a difference in how the prisoner copes with their detention.

2. Reduce Levels of Uncertainty: Maintaining constant and transparent communication with the political prisoner, informing them about the progress of their case, legal defense efforts and any changes in his situation can help dispel uncertainty. Choose your words consciously and always consider their emotional state.

3. Wellness Care: Rather than thinking long-term, recommend that the political prisoner concentrate on the near future, taking it one

day at a time. Encourage them to establish a daily routine that addresses their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. Sticking to this routine can be a small victory that will mitigate the feeling of wasted time, keep them busy and give them purpose. You can recommend reading, writing, exercise and prayer or meditation. Remember that for political prisoners, emotional care can be a crucial source of strength and resilience in difficult times. This spiritual enrichment need not be tied to religion, but it can help them maintain hope and dignity.

- 4. Priority Needs:** The most important needs to consider include the provision of food and basic supplies, such as food, clothing and personal hygiene items. In situations where they are facing illness, it is crucial to do everything possible to ensure their continued access to necessary medications. In addition, if possible, it is valuable to bring reading material, photographs of family members and other items that can provide comfort and maintain a connection to the outside world, which together will significantly improve their quality of life in prison.
- 5. Prisoner's Will:** Decisions regarding release strategy must have the prisoner's approval. However, in situations where direct communication is not possible, you will have to will make decisions that always prioritize the prisoner's welfare and release.
- 6. Alliances with other Prisoners and their Families:** The formation of solidarity networks between political prisoners and their families can be of great help. This facilitates collaboration on logistical issues, provides financial and emotional support, and allows for the exchange of information.

Each prisoner's experience is unique, and it is essential to tailor accompaniment and support to their specific circumstances. These strategies can help maintain the spirit and health of the political prisoner at this challenging time.

People Accompanying a Political Prisoner: Challenges and Needs

Those accompanying political prisoners, although not physically imprisoned, face their own battle. Their struggle is twofold: they must keep the prisoner's cause alive, while also navigating the tumultuous sea of emotions and logistical challenges that detention brings. Below, we will explore in detail some of the challenges you might experience:

- 1. Overwhelming Emotions:** News of the detention of a loved one for political reasons can be devastating. Fear of the unknown, concern for safety and well-being, anger at the injustice, helplessness in the face of the situation, panic and anxiety attacks, and deep sadness are some of the overwhelming emotions you may be facing in this situation.
- 2. Restricted Communication with the Prisoner:** Being an extra-judicial case, there may be restrictions on visits and monitoring of the political prisoner's situation. This represents a major challenge, as maintaining effective communication is essential to provide emotional support and a sense of reassurance and well-being.
- 3. Despair:** In the midst of uncertainty and adversity, knowledge of the flawed national legal system and anger at injustice can gradually erode hope for their release. Prolonged detention, the opacity of the legal process and the perceived lack of fairness can weigh on the spirits of those fighting for the freedom of their loved ones.
- 4. Being Subject to Persecution, Threats and Violence:** Persecution, threats and violence inflicted by the regime can be extremely overwhelming and frightening. These can manifest themselves through constant surveillance, intimidation, intrusion into one's life, and physical or psychological violence, creating an environment of constant fear and tension.

In the following section we will explore strategies and practical tips for addressing these challenges and needs. The goal is to provide you with guidance and support to help you face this difficult situation with determination.

Strategies for the Well-being of the People Accompanying a Political Prisoners

- 1. Acknowledge Reality:** Accepting the reality of the situation is the first step in making difficult decisions. Recognizing that the struggle may be long and challenging can help you mentally prepare for the road ahead. This experience can either strengthen you or destroy you. You need to ask yourself, which path will you take? Living through these difficult circumstances will make you see that you are much stronger than you think and this experience can contribute to your evolution as a human being.
- 2. Believe in Yourself:** Believe in yourself with unwavering conviction. You have within you a strength that can overcome any obstacle, an intelligence that can find solutions in the midst of adversity and a courage that will guide you on this journey. Remember that you cannot feel small in the face of this challenge, keep in your mind and heart the certainty that you are greater than any difficulty that may come your way.
- 3. Build Strength and Resilience:** In the midst of uncertainty and adversity, maintaining hope and solidarity becomes a difficult task. However, by supporting each other, ways can be found to keep the cause and the struggle alive, and strengthen family ties and resilience in the face of adversity. Family unity is an invaluable resource. Through shared activities, such as family gatherings or events in support of the political prisoner, you can maintain a sense of purpose and cohesion.
- 4. Work as a Team and Learn to Trust:** Working as a team can ease the emotional and logistical burden of the detainment of your loved one. You are not alone on this journey. You can fully rely on your support network, as well as those who contribute to your cause, including experts and human rights organizations. In this way, responsibilities will be fulfilled in a joint and highly efficient manner. In addition, solidarity and collaboration with other relatives of political prisoners can provide you with invaluable emotional support.

5. **Promote Gratitude and Faith:** Cultivating gratitude on a daily basis and trusting in a higher power or greater force can help you in this process of emotional support. Acknowledging small victories and blessings in the midst of adversity can bring you comfort and hope. Positivity and faith can act as emotional anchors. You can research stories of resilience and previous successes in the struggle for justice to fill yourself with optimism.
6. **Take Care of your Wellness:** Self-care is crucial. Practicing adequate rest, healthy eating, and attention to your emotional needs is essential to maintaining the strength necessary to support the political prisoner. Your physical and mental health is the foundation upon which the ability to help is built. Establish regular exercise routines and make sure you get enough sleep in order to maintain your physical and mental vitality. We also recommend that you seek treatment from a psychologist or other mental health experts for your emotional support.
7. **Act from Love:** Love is a fundamental pillar in this journey. Do not underestimate the healing and strengthening power of the love you feel for the person you are working to liberate. This will help you continue the struggle even when you feel fatigued, discouraged or in despair. Also, the love you share with other family members and friends in difficult times creates an indestructible bond that can overcome even the most challenging adversities. Remember that love is a source of energy and resilience that can help you face the darkest moments with courage and determination.
8. **Use Powerful Language:** Don't underestimate the impact your own language can have on your ability to face this difficulty with courage and determination. Using "power" language will allow you to strengthen your self-confidence, encourage positive action and face challenges with a proactive and resilient attitude. To do this you must eliminate restrictive words, use positive affirmations, encourage positive self-talk and visualize success.

- 9. Trust your Strategy:** Trust that every day you are taking concrete steps towards your goal: the release of the political prisoner. Every action you take is part of a carefully planned strategy, and although some of these actions may seem small, they are all steps toward liberation.
- 10. Prepare to Make Decisions:** Throughout this process, you will be constantly making decisions, as the pathway to freedom is filled with dilemmas that may be approached by different paths. Decision making is an essential part of this journey: from deciding how to strategically approach the situation, such as making your loved one's detention public or private, to making practical day-to-day decisions.

These strategies can help you cope with the difficulties you face and maintain a positive and resilient approach as you fight for their release. Remember that the struggle for the release of political prisoners is a multi-faceted battle, requiring resilience, solidarity and a deep understanding of the needs of both the prisoner and their loved ones. Through comprehensive accompaniment, you can strengthen this struggle, ensuring that every gesture of accompaniment counts on the road to his freedom.

Example

Felix Maradiaga, human rights defender, prominent Nicaraguan politician and presidential candidate in Nicaragua in 2021, suffered arbitrary detention and a 13-year prison sentence during a repressive campaign led by Daniel Ortega's regime. In the infamous prison known as "El Chipote," Felix endured inhumane conditions: torture, solitary confinement, extremely limited visits and virtually no communication with his family, all during a harrowing 611-day period. In addition, he was denied access to any reading or writing materials, including the Bible.

Communication with his family became a major challenge. His wife, Berta Valle, and daughter Alejandra were forced into exile to protect

their safety. During their arbitrary detention, they were forbidden any form of correspondence or phone calls. It was not until a month before his release that they were able to make their first 9-minute video call and send him letters on two occasions.

Felix's sister, who was in Nicaragua, was the only person authorized to visit him, occasionally accompanied by her husband. Over the course of more than 20 months, there were only 12 visits, in which she gave him updates on the liberation strategy, instilling hope. Through her, Felix received messages of love and encouragement from his family and friends, turning those words into solid pillars of strength that fueled his courage and determination to keep fighting despite the adversity.

Felix's sister diligently monitored his situation, ensuring that some of his basic needs were met, such as access to medication and prescription glasses. She was obliged to deliver two bottles of water daily to "El Chipote", essential for his consumption and hygiene. Over time, family members of other political prisoners joined in solidarity, sharing responsibility to ease everyone's burden. Family members of those detained for political reasons in Nicaragua face various forms of aggression and violation of their rights, often suffering repercussions such as loss of employment due to the prolonged absences required to care for their loved ones in detention.

Despite the challenging circumstances, Felix established a daily routine of self-care, focusing on physical, mental and spiritual exercises. Meanwhile, Berta became a tireless advocate for the freedom of her husband and all political persons in Nicaragua.

After more than 20 agonizing months, on February 9, 2023, Felix and 221 other political prisoners were expatriated to the United States. The Ortega regime stripped them of their nationality and confiscated their property. Their story underscores the paramount importance of support and solidarity for political prisoners and their families in times of adversity.

My personal notes

My personal notes





Chapter 5

FORMING AND MANAGING SUPPORT NETWORKS

Forming a strong and effective support network is a critical step in the release of a political prisoner. This network can provide resources, connections, advice and, most importantly, pressure on the authorities to achieve the release of the detainee.

It is important to manage these networks efficiently, ensuring that each member is aware of relevant updates and the tasks they can perform to help. This may involve setting up communication groups, organizing regular meetings, and assigning specific roles and responsibilities. A strong support network can make all the difference in the outcome of a political prisoner's fight for freedom.

Don't get overwhelmed thinking that you won't find people to join your support network. Most networks start with close family members. As the case gains visibility, you will have the opportunity to add more allies if you consider it necessary.

Here are some strategies for creating and maintaining an effective support network:

Identifying Potential Allies

Begin by identifying individuals and organizations that you can trust and who may be willing to support your cause. These may include family and friends, human rights organizations, civil society groups, public and political figures, the media, as well as lawyers and relatives of other political prisoners.

Don't forget the mourners, those who share a sense of loss or injustice as a consequence of political detentions and are motivated to support your cause. Do not underestimate anyone. In the struggle for democracy, every gesture of solidarity counts and every voice raised strengthens the chorus of freedom.

Distributing Roles among Allies

The diversity of your support network also means that each ally may have a unique and valuable role to play. Some of the roles may include:

- **Spokesperson:** This role involves speaking on behalf of the political prisoner and their cause. Spokespersons should be recognized as such so that their communications are understood as official. It is suggested that, whenever possible, the spokesperson should always be the same person or group of people.
- **Monitoring:** Those in this role keep a record of the detainee's situation, the actions of the authorities and any other relevant developments. The use of the logbook can be instrumental in keeping track of all relevant facts related to the detainee's situation.
- **Accompaniment:** Those who exercise this role have the possibility of making prison visits to the political prisoner, generally close family members or lawyers. In each visit it will be essential to record the conditions of detention to assess the needs of the political prisoner and demand respect for their human rights. The

Mandela Rules are mandatory reading for this group.¹⁵ During each visit the prisoner should be made to feel that they are not alone and be reassured that work is being done for their freedom.

- **Lobbying:** This role involves carrying out all activities necessary to persuade the decisions that may be made by influential people at national and international level.
- **Raising Awareness and Mobilization Activities:** Some partners such as members of groups affiliated with the detainee and civil society organizations may be well positioned to organize or participate in public demonstrations, marches and other forms of protest.
- **Legal representation:** This role will be performed by lawyers, who will work to ensure that the detainee's rights are respected and challenge the legality of the detention. Free legal assistance can be obtained through human rights organizations. (See Chapter 10)

Commitment among Allies

After identifying your potential allies, it is essential to establish a mutual commitment. You should explain the situation in detail, highlighting its importance and clarifying how they can contribute. It is crucial that allies understand the risks of becoming involved in the cause, making sure that they are willing to support the release of the political prisoner. When an ally feels they can no longer support the cause, they should commit to announcing this immediately.

Encouraging Cooperation

You may find individuals or groups who are willing to support the cause but who may have different approaches or priorities. Work to foster cooperation among these diverse actors, looking for ways to align objec-

¹⁵ United Nations General Assembly. United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Resolution 70/175. 17 December 2015.

tives and combine resources when possible. All allies should recognize each other as members of the same team, never forgetting that they are fighting for a common goal: the release of the political prisoner.

Maintaining Communication

Regular and open communication is essential to maintaining a strong support network. Provide the support network with frequent updates on the political prisoner's situation, thank them for their efforts and solidarity, and ask for help when needed. You may also consider creating a newsletter, a group chat, a website, or social networking page to facilitate communication.

Mental Health Maintenance

Mental health is the most important thing for the people who make up the support network and the political prisoner. The emotional burden and stress can be overwhelming in these circumstances. In many cases, those close to the prisoner become secondary or direct victims of government attacks. It is advisable to seek professional psycho-emotional support. Through non-governmental organizations, it is possible to access free assistance specifically for people in your situation. It is crucial to maintain a balance between fighting for justice and taking care of your mental health.

Evaluation and Adjustment of the Support Network

A crucial part of building and managing your support network is the ongoing evaluation of its effectiveness. This will allow you to identify who in your network can have the most significant impact and who needs to adjust their roles or responsibilities. Maintain open communication with your network members to ensure that they are committed and effectively engaged in the cause.

Example

In 2014, Leopoldo López, an influential politician and opposition leader in Venezuela, was detained by the Nicolás Maduro regime. His detention raised local and international concern, and a strong network of support was formed by his wife Lilian Tintori, his mother Antonieta Mendoza, human rights organizations, lawyers, diplomats from democratic countries and activists.

Lilian Tintori emerged as a passionate spokesperson, bringing her husband's story to national and international media and events, while Antonieta Mendoza, his mother, maintained a tireless struggle to keep attention focused on her son's situation. Human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, documented abuses and rights violations during his detention, and foreign politicians exerted diplomatic pressure on the dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro.

The support network also included lawyers, who provided legal advice both in Venezuela and abroad, working to ensure Leopoldo López's defense and respect for his rights. In addition, activists contributed to disseminating information and organizing online campaigns and street activities to raise awareness of the case and the situation in Venezuela.

In keeping with this chapter, the story of Leopoldo López in Venezuela vividly exemplifies the importance of support networks in freeing political prisoners. We have seen how his family, friends, colleagues and allies came together to champion his cause, raising awareness, lobbying diplomatically and securing legal remedies.

Now, we will analyze the construction of a narrative. This chapter will be your guide in charting a path to the ultimate goal: the release of the political prisoner. We will explore the key elements of this strategy to create a solid, fact-based communications campaign that challenges the false narratives often used by authoritarian regimes to justify arbitrary political detentions.

My personal notes

My personal notes





Chapter 6

NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION: HOW TO TALK ABOUT POLITICAL PRISONERS

Before you begin any communication, you must be clear on what your main message is. What do you want people to know and understand about the detainee and their situation? What is the call to action for your audience? You must be able to express these points clearly and coherently, with a human approach which resists counterproductive narratives that may distort reality.

Remember that, in many cases, regimes weave false narratives to justify arbitrary detentions for political reasons. These regimes, anxious to maintain their control, often resort to disinformation and manipulation to justify their actions and discredit dissidents.

In this context, your main message should be a strong, fact-based response that demolishes false narratives. When advocating for the release of a political prisoner, truth, morality and justice are on your side. Your

call to action should be clear and resonant, urging the audience to unite in defending the truth and demanding the release of the political prisoner.

Take a firm stance, demanding recognition and protection of universal human rights. We are not talking about concessions or favors. You are claiming rights intrinsic to human dignity, whose respect is obligatory on the part of the authorities.

Here is a guide to navigating this tricky task.

Creating the Detainee's Profile

Before you start talking about your situation, it is crucial to provide an overview of who the person is so that others can understand their context and struggle

1. Identify the Political Prisoner's Activities and Affiliations:

Describe what activities the political prisoner was involved in prior to their detention. Did he participate in peaceful protests? Were they a member of any political or social groups? These details will help paint a picture of their civic engagement.

2. Highlight their Trajectory: Briefly explain the trajectory of the political prisoner. How did they become an activist? Have they had other roles in society? This gives an idea of their achievements and struggles.

3. Describe the Detainee's Personal Life: Provide some details about their personal life to humanize your situation. This may include details about their family, hobbies, future plans or health conditions.

4. Discusses the Detention and its Conditions: Detail the circumstances of the person's detention and the conditions of their detention. This can help focus attention on the human rights violations and injustices that have led to their incarceration.

5. Include a Message from the Prisoner: Incorporate direct messages from the political prisoner into your narrative. If you are

able to make contact with the prisoner, you can use an audio, letter or short message to convey their thoughts and feelings about the situation. Otherwise, you can make reference to the ideals of their struggle. This can help to further personalize his story and establish an emotional connection with listeners or readers.

Creating a detailed, human profile of the political prisoner is an essential step in drawing attention to their situation and mobilizing support. By sharing their story, we are highlighting the injustices that have led to their detention and helping to advance the cause of human rights.

Monitoring the Tone of the Message

In the struggle for human rights, how we communicate our cause can be as important as the cause itself. It is crucial that we talk about political prisoners in a way that elicits empathy and action.

- 1. Emphasize the Political Nature of the Detention:** It is critical to explain that the person is a political prisoner and not a criminal. Do not hesitate to label him or her as a political prisoner; this title can provide an additional layer of protection. Remember that detentions for political reasons are outside the law. This is why governments go to such great lengths to deny that they have political prisoners.
- 2. Humanize the Political Prisoner:** Emphasize that, beyond their activism, they have a life, family, friends, passions and dreams like any other person.
- 3. Express your Pain:** As someone close to the political prisoner, your pain can be a powerful driver of empathy but you must maintain a posture of strength.
- 4. Use Human Rights Language:** Use human rights terminology to convey that what happened to the political prisoner is an unacceptable violation of their fundamental rights.

5. Keep Information Detailed, Organized, and Updated:

Be sure to communicate known details about the person's current situation accurately and chronologically. For example, if the prisoner suffers from a chronic illness, constantly monitor to report whether the prisoner is receiving necessary medical care. This highlights concern for their well-being and underscores possible rights violations.

6. Fight for the Freedom of all Political Prisoners:

Be sure to mention that your loved one is not the only one in this situation. Many others are also being unjustly imprisoned for political reasons. Remember, whoever fights for the freedom of one political prisoner, fights for the freedom of all political prisoners and the rebuilding of democracy.

Remembering these points when constructing and conveying the message about political prisoners is essential for mobilizing empathy and action. Keep alive the humanity of political prisoners, express the pain of their absence, use language that defends their rights, and remember that the fight for one is the fight for all. Every word and every story we share has the potential to touch people, change perceptions and transform systems. Together, we can make a difference and help rebuild democracy and freedom for all.

Call to Action

Following the creation of the full profile of the political prisoner, there must be a clear and specific call to action. Demanding the release of the political prisoner will always be the primary call. Depending on the particular situation of the political prisoner and the audience you are addressing, you may include other calls. These could involve signing a petition, sending letters to political representatives, donating to a legal defense fund, participating in peaceful protests or vigils, among others.

Evaluation and Adjustment

Once you have established this narrative, it is critical to stay true to it in order to maintain consistency and credibility. However, one must also

be aware that circumstances may change and the narrative may need to adapt to new realities. The political situation can change drastically and, with it, the context in which the political prisoner finds themselves. This is where flexibility becomes vital. We should not be afraid to revise and adjust our narrative to reflect these new circumstances.

As you navigate these changes, it is crucial not to lose sight of the ultimate goal: the release of the political prisoner. This is the core of our narrative, and it must remain constant, no matter how the situation develops.

Example

Let's explore the story of Isidro Baldenegro López, a Mexican community leader and environmental rights activist who fought tirelessly for the preservation of the forests and lands of indigenous communities in the Sierra Madre Occidental.

From a young age, Isidro witnessed firsthand the illegal logging that threatened his ancestral land and his community's way of life. Despite the risks and threats, he decided it was time to take action and became a passionate advocate for the environment and indigenous rights. Isidro, in addition to being an environmental advocate, was a father and enjoyed walking through the forests and connecting with the nature he loved and sought to protect. His dream was to unite his community to resist illegal logging and preserve their ancestral legacy.

Thus, Isidro actively participated in peaceful protests in defense of the forests and lands of indigenous communities in the region. His courage and commitment inspired others to join the cause, and he soon became a respected community leader.

In 2003, Isidro was unjustly detained after years of activism in defense of indigenous territory and environmental protection. The importance of Isidro's liberation narrative lay in the presentation of these dreams, aspirations, and experiences, which were included in various media outlets and exposed by numerous human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International. Thus, despite his detention, his struggle was a constant reminder of the importance of preserving the land and indigenous culture, forcing the authorities to release him 15 months after his detention.

So far, we have carefully woven together the words that make up the narrative around political prisoners. Every story, every detail, has been purposefully shaped to illuminate the struggle for justice and freedom. However, our work does not stop at the language we use. The visual image of a political prisoner can add an even deeper dimension to our narrative, becoming a powerful vehicle for mobilizing support and solidarity. In the next chapter, we will explore this aspect in depth, always keeping in mind the integrity of our overall communication strategy and the core objectives of our liberation campaign.

My personal notes





Chapter 7

SELECTING THE POLITICAL PRISONER'S IMAGE FOR COMMUNICATIONS

The visual image of a political prisoner can be a powerful tool in storytelling and mobilizing support. The selection and use of the image of a political prisoner is not merely aesthetic; it has profound implications for how the campaign is perceived and the ability to mobilize empathy and support. As such, this process must be carried out with consideration and care, in line with the overall communication strategy and objectives of the release campaign. Here are some aspects to consider:

Selecting an Appropriate Image

The selection of a representative image is crucial. Preferably, it should be a recent photograph that allows the political prisoner to be easily identified. The image should resonate with the audience and humanize the individual, allowing people to connect emotionally with their story.

In the Absence of a Photograph

If a photograph of the political prisoner does not exist, one may choose to create a representative drawing. Although not a photographic reproduction, a well-executed drawing can capture the essence and humanity of the person and serve as a powerful symbol.

Communicating Consistently

The selected image should be used consistently across all communication platforms to create a coherent visual identity.

Ensuring Respect and Dignity

It is vital to ensure that the image selected is treated with respect and dignity, reflecting the values and objectives of the campaign.

My personal notes

Example

In the campaign to free Nelson Mandela, anti-apartheid activist and leader of the African National Congress, his image was crucial. During his 27-year imprisonment, recent photographs were rare and strictly controlled by the apartheid regime. However, an older image of Mandela, showing him in his stronghold, with a determined gaze, was widely used on posters, T-shirts and banners with the slogan "Freedom for Nelson Mandela." Although not a recent image, this photograph became a potent symbol of resistance and unity. In the absence of recent photographs, the image was able to encapsulate the essence of his struggle and serve as a strong reminder of his personal sacrifice and the broader cause for freedom and equality in South Africa.

The selection of this image aligned perfectly with the objectives and tone of the campaign, demonstrating that even in challenging circumstances, a carefully selected image can have a profound and lasting impact on public perception and the mobilization of global support.

In the complex task of advocating for the release of political prisoners, where emotions and politics are deeply intertwined, the selected image can become a beacon of clarity and understanding, uniting people from different backgrounds under a common cause. Historical experience teaches us that this selection, while it may seem a minor detail, is actually an integral and powerful part of the larger strategy, and must be approached with the seriousness and consideration it deserves.





Chapter 8

COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT

Communications play a crucial role in any initiative aimed at the release of a political prisoner. They represent the vehicle through which awareness is generated, support is garnered and pressure is exerted on those responsible.

It is important to keep in mind that traditional judicial remedies are often insufficient to secure the release of a political prisoner. Therefore, it is essential to win the battle for public opinion despite how complex it may be in spaces where freedom of expression is restricted. Consequently, communications must always be in tune with the legal strategy adopted. In this chapter, we will explore several key areas of communications and offer practical guidelines and tips to optimize their effectiveness.

Selecting Communication Channels

There are a wide variety of communication channels at your disposal. It is important to select the ones that are most effective in reaching your target audience. This can include traditional media, social media, email newsletters, public events, text message chains, a website and more.

It is important to remember that different channels are effective for different audiences, so you may need to use multiple channels to reach all the people you want to reach. Both communicational approaches, traditional and digital, are complementary and should be used in tandem for a comprehensive and effective communications strategy.

Establishing and Managing a Media Network

A network of media contacts can be an invaluable tool to help you amplify your message. This can include journalists, bloggers, influencers and others who may be interested in covering your cause. It is critical that you build your own database. If you have not had previous contact with them, you can reach out through social media and begin to build a rapport. It is important to keep this database updated and constantly growing. To cultivate this relationship, share accurate and regularly updated information with your media network and thank them when they cover your cause.

Crisis Communication Planning

There is always a risk of a communication crisis such as the release of a negative story in the media or a backlash on social media. It is important to have a plan to handle these situations and be able to react quickly to minimize the damage. Don't fall into provocations, false narratives must be met with the truth. Your best defense will always be to speak out about the situation of the political prisoner and demand respect for their rights.

Throughout this process, you must maintain consistency in your communications, ensuring that everything you say and do supports your primary objective of freeing the political prisoner.

Example

Loujain al-Hathloul, a prominent women's rights activist in Saudi Arabia, was detained in 2018. Loujain had been courageously advocating for women's right to drive and gender equality in the country. When news of her detention became public, her sister, Lina, spearheaded a high-profile campaign on her behalf. Media and social media were used to share Loujain's story and the injustices she faced. This approach raised the profile of her case internationally, generated widespread support, and exerted significant pressure on the Saudi government.

Building a strong network of media contacts was a crucial part of this strategy. Through social media interactions and participation in events, connections were established that allowed them to amplify their message and maintain constant media coverage. Additionally, they were prepared to respond promptly and maintain the integrity of their message, even when faced with unexpected challenges. Throughout the entire process, consistency in communications was essential. Every message, whether through traditional or digital media, contributed to the main goal: the release of Loujain al-Hathloul and the pursuit of justice in her case. The narrative remained focused and aligned with the overall purpose of the campaign.

In Loujain al-Hathloul's case, the public communication strategy proved effective in generating global awareness, mobilizing international support and putting pressure on the government. However, each political prisoner's situation is unique and, therefore, it is essential to carefully assess the circumstances before deciding to publicize the case. Whatever strategy you choose, the ultimate goal should always be the release of the political prisoner and the promotion of justice in their case.

Practical Advice**1. Managing Communications through Traditional Means**

Traditional media, such as newspapers, radio and television, remain critical to reaching a broad audience. Here are some key considerations:

- **Be Prepared:** Before any interview or media appearance, spend time researching the media outlet, the journalist and the topic to be discussed. Familiarize yourself with the format and style of the program or medium in which you will be appearing. Organize your thoughts and define the key messages you want to convey.
- **Stick to the Narrative:** Identify the main points you want to communicate and express them clearly and concisely. Avoid using jargon or technical terms that may be difficult for the general public to understand. Use simple, direct language to make your message accessible and effective. See Chapter 6.
- **Use Examples and Anecdotes:** Illustrate your message with concrete examples and personal anecdotes. Sharing real stories can make your message more impactful and relatable to your audience. These stories will help generate empathy and help people better understand the situation of political prisoners.
- **Remain Calm and Respectful:** During your participation, keep your composure and be respectful, even if difficult or provocative questions arise. Respond clearly and politely, avoiding unnecessary arguments or confrontations. Stay focused on your message and the objectives of the interview.
- **Be Authentic and Connect at an Emotional Level:** Show your honest concern and emotional connection to the situation of your loved one and other political prisoners. Allow your emotions to come through in your voice and body language, but avoid losing control or falling into despair. Authenticity and emotional connection can build audience empathy and strengthen your message.
- **Use Relevant Facts and Data:** If possible, back up your message with relevant data, statistics and facts to support your position. This can increase the credibility of your arguments and strengthen your case. Provide accurate and verifiable information that supports your claims and provides context to the situation of political prisoners.

- **Don't Speculate or Talk about Unknown Topics:** If you are asked questions about topics you don't know or don't have accurate information about, it's best to admit it and focus on what you do know. Avoid speculation or providing misinformation that could damage your credibility. It is important to maintain honesty and integrity in your answers.
- **Call to Action:** Take advantage of the final time or space of your communication to make a call to action. Ask the audience to join the cause, sign petitions, disseminate information or take concrete actions to support the release of political prisoners. Provide information on how they can get involved and make a difference in the fight for justice.
- **Be Grateful:** At the end of your participation, show gratitude to the journalist for the opportunity to share your story and message. Thank them for their interest and support in spreading the word about the situation of political prisoners. Express your gratitude sincerely and cordially.
- **Practice:** Conduct mock interviews or media appearances to familiarize yourself with the dynamics and gain confidence in your ability to communicate effectively. Preparation and practice will help improve your communication skills and get your message across clearly and effectively.

2. Social Media Communications Management

In the digital age, social media offers a powerful platform to spread messages and mobilize support. Here are some guidelines:

- **Platform Knowledge:** Each social media network has its own style and audience. Know the particularities of each one and adapt your message accordingly.¹⁶

¹⁶ These are some of the many social media platforms available: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, Reddit.

- **Account Creation and Use:** Use an existing political prisoner account or create new accounts dedicated specifically to your case. This can serve as a centralized hub for information, updates and calls to action.
- **Define the Objective of the Campaign:** Evaluate the stage of the arbitrary detention and establish the objective of the campaign accordingly. It can be to communicate the arbitrary facts, protect the integrity of the detained person, raise awareness about the situation or promote specific actions. Of course, always adhering to the defined narrative and the ultimate goal, the freedom of the political prisoner.
- **Define the Message:** Identify the main points you want to communicate and express them clearly and concisely.
- **Use of Multimedia:** Images, videos and graphics can greatly enhance the impact of your message. Use visual media effectively.

Social Network	Subject	Image or video	Message

- **Hashtag Creation:** Create a hashtag that represents the campaign and encourage users to use it in their related posts. This will facilitate the grouping of content and allow the message to spread widely. For example, you can create a hashtag such as #FreePoliticalPrisoners or #Free(name of the political prisoner).
- **Strategic Tagging:** Tag human rights organizations, relevant activists, media or public figures who may be interested in the issue or who can amplify your message. This will help increase the visibility of the campaign.
- **Organization of Publications:** Prepare messages in advance and organize your posts in a consistent manner. The easiest way to do this is through a publication log.
- **Publication Scheduling:** Determine the right time to publish, considering the reach of the audience and the context in which the message will be released. Use publication scheduling tools

	Hashtags	Tagged	Date of publication	Time of publication

to optimize the dissemination and reach of your content. Many of these tools are free.

- **Frequency of Publications:** Constant presence on social networks with at least 3 publications per week is recommended. Nevertheless, permanent campaigns can also be characterized by activities such as keeping track of days (spent in deprivation of liberty, isolation, or restricted visitation), with daily updates. These publications must be daily, and are valuable in situations of disappearance or prolonged incommunicado detention.
- **Active Participation and Immediate Response:** Interact with followers, respond to comments and participate in conversations. Active participation builds a strong and engaged community.
- **Surveillance and Crisis Response:** Establish protocols for monitoring and responding to negative comments or misinformation. Always maintain respectful treatment. Do not fall into provocations.
- **Call to Action:** Provides concrete ways in which followers can take action online, whether by signing a petition, sharing a post, using a hashtag, or donating.

Effective communications management is not only essential to maintain a cohesive strategy, but also provides us with a powerful tool to convene and sensitize people more effectively. Public mobilization and awareness campaigns play a crucial role in generating awareness, building public support and putting pressure on authorities to achieve liberation. In the next chapter, we will explore these strategies in detail, providing practical guidance and concrete examples for you to carry out successful campaigns in your quest for justice and freedom.

My personal notes



Chapter 9

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND MOBILIZATION CAMPAIGNS

Remember that your loved one was detained extrajudicially (by non-legal means), therefore, their release is a complex issue that requires a variety of approaches and tactics. That is why awareness-raising and mobilization activities can play a crucial role in your struggle for release. These campaigns are the vehicles that bring the message of justice and freedom to the public consciousness, mobilizing individuals and communities to unite in this cause.

In pursuit of this noble goal, you can often face significant challenges. For example, it is not always feasible or easy to launch large-scale campaigns, and crowds may not flock to the streets in support of your cause. However, you should not be discouraged; the goal of awareness campaigning and mobilization is to keep the plight of the political prisoner in the public eye. You can always get support from people close to the political prisoner and with common interests. Their relatives and comrades in cause are ideal to start campaigns and mobilizations.

By generating public attention and keeping the issue at the center of the conversation, you can get society as a whole involved in the cause resulting in significant pressure on the governments and institutions responsible for keeping your loved one unjustly detained.

These activities go beyond simple demonstrations and marches, encompassing a wide range of approaches that involve society at different levels. From cultural events and artistic projects to symbolic actions and strategic collaborations, a wave of solidarity is created that grows from small individual actions.

While it may sound challenging, in this chapter, we will explore strategies and tactics for you to carry out these public awareness and mobilization campaigns effectively, drawing on lessons learned from decades of nonviolent civil resistance around the world.

Planning Awareness and Mobilization Campaigns

Strategic planning is critical in the fight for the release of a loved one, especially when resources are limited and it is not possible to gather large crowds. Even if you face constraints, don't underestimate the power of a committed society in the fight for the release of political prisoners. In this section, we will explore how to make the most of your available resources, mobilize an audience committed to your cause and keep your loved one's case in the public eye:

- 1. Set Clear Objectives:** You should specify your concrete goals in the awareness campaign, to do so, take into account the following, are you focusing solely on the release of your loved one or are you also seeking to secure other rights? For example, in addition to the release of your loved one, you might consider additional objectives, such as ensuring access to medication, transfer to court for trial, and protection from torture and inhumane treatment. Defining objectives can provide you with a sharp focus, while also enabling evaluation of the campaign's success and adaptation of strategies, if necessary. You may even consider the option of having an international and a national mobilization and awareness campaign, each with its own specific focus and objective.

2. Choose the Type of Campaign You Want to Carry Out: After setting clear objectives, it is essential to choose the type of mobilization or awareness campaign you want to conduct. This choice will determine the strategy and tactics you will implement to achieve your goals. You can opt for broader strategies that mobilize a large number of people, such as mass demonstrations or social media campaigns that seek to go viral. On the other hand, you can also consider artistic strategies that use art and creativity to draw attention to your cause, or activist-led strategies that involve human rights defenders and relevant organizations in joint actions. Each type of campaign has its own advantages and challenges, so it is crucial to select the one that makes the most sense for your cause and your specific context. Later in this chapter we will provide you with more examples of campaigns you can run.

3. Identify the Target Audience: The type of campaign you choose is influenced by your target audience. Even though you can target large masses, you should focus on identifying and segmenting a smaller but influential target audience. Ask yourself, who would join your campaign? This may include family members, friends, classmates, opinion leaders, political figures, human rights organizations, and people with the ability to lobby the relevant authorities. By involving these actors you can maximize the mobilization and impact of the campaign.

4. Establish a Schedule: Carefully planning the dates of your actions is of great importance, even if your activities are smaller. You should be on the lookout for key opportunities and milestones relevant to your cause, such as significant anniversaries or international events related to human rights. Taking advantage of these moments can give visibility to your campaign and increase its impact.

5. Develop the Core Message: A powerful message can transcend geographical barriers and expand your reach, mobilizing people to rally for your loved one's cause or take action in their own context. The spokesperson is in charge of conveying this message, and should not underestimate its power. The mes-

sage should be clear, poignant, easy to remember and a call to action that can include such things as allowing the prisoner to be seen by loved ones, allowing regular visits, ending solitary confinement, providing adequate medical care, allowing legal representation, guaranteeing time outdoors, and ensuring that the case is brought before courts of law. Draw on Chapters 6, 7, and 8 to develop this message.

- 6. Seek Allies:** Identify allies and collaborators who share your goals. Collaborating with human rights organizations, activist groups and influential figures can multiply your impact. Together, you can join forces to increase the visibility of the cause and put pressure on the authorities responsible for the political prisoner's detention.
- 7. Coordinate Among the Support Network:** Effective coordination and a coherent spokesperson are essential to clearly and convincingly conveying the campaign's objectives and demands in collective activities. The spokesperson should be responsible for delivering the core message, while other members of the support network can offer their assistance to the coordinator to ensure that the campaign runs smoothly. This could involve other members being available to provide logistical support, participate in the planning and execution of activities, or act as secondary spokespersons if necessary.
- 8. Evaluation and Adjustment:** The attendance record, photographs and videos of the awareness campaign are tangible proof of the progress of your actions. This record will allow you to evaluate the impact and adjust the strategy when necessary.

Mobilization and Awareness Strategies

There are numerous types of activities you can carry out in the struggle for the release of political prisoners, and these activities can be powerful tools for raising awareness, mobilizing support and pressing for justice. Combining traditional and creative methods can have an even greater impact on public awareness and increase pressure on the authorities to release political prisoners.

Below we will offer you a variety of strategies to get your campaign off to a good start:

- **Peaceful Demonstrations:** Organize public demonstrations in strategic locations to draw attention to the case of a political prisoner.
- **Marches and Rallies:** Conduct marches and rallies to mobilize the community and generate media coverage.
- **Letter Writing:** Encourage massive letter writing campaigns to pressure the authorities and ask for the release of the political prisoner.
- **Social Media Campaigns:** Creating online campaigns to spread the message is another powerful tool. Return to Chapter 8 to review the communication strategy.
- **Mural Painting and Graffiti:** Using urban art to convey messages of support for the release of political prisoners in public places.
- **Tributes and Commemorations:** Organize commemorative events in honor of the political prisoner and use them to raise community awareness.
- **Signature Collection Campaigns:** Conduct campaigns to collect signatures in support of the release of the political prisoner and present them to the authorities.
- **Dissemination of Documentaries and Testimonies:** Create and disseminate documentaries, interviews and testimonies that shed light on the situation of political prisoners.
- **Concerts and Cultural Events:** Organize cultural events, such as benefit concerts, to raise funds and awareness for the case.
- **Symbolic Actions:** Carry out actions such as candlelight vigils, human chains or temporary artistic installations in emblematic places to remember the political prisoner.

Don't limit yourself to this list, these are just suggestions.¹⁷ The limit is creativity. Any other activity you can think of can add great value to your campaign for the release of your loved one.

¹⁷ You can find inspiration from a variety of sources, such as Gene Sharp's 'How to wage nonviolent struggle' or M. Beer's '346 tactics of civil resistance in the 21st century' (2021), to develop additional strategies and activities that add great value to your cause.

Constantly reminding society about the situation of political prisoners, humanizing their stories and using creative and collaborative tactics can put significant pressure on the responsible authorities. It will also help maintain the strength of the political prisoners who will feel supported in their struggle and can trust that there are people out there working for their freedom.

The struggle for justice and freedom requires determination, commitment and a focus on human rights. With careful planning and ongoing monitoring, public awareness and mobilization campaigns can play a crucial role in your quest for your loved one's release.

Example

In June 2016, Bahraini authorities detained human rights defender Nabeel Rajab and subsequently sentenced him to five years in prison for peacefully expressing his views online. The news of his detention spread rapidly internationally, leading to a wave of condemnations from human rights organizations, activists, and concerned individuals. This case was widely perceived as a violation of freedom of expression and an unjust attack on human rights advocacy.

In response, human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Index on Censorship, and Reporters Without Borders, along with activists from around the world, joined forces to raise awareness about Nabeel Rajab's situation. They organized protests, initiated online petitions, and conducted public awareness campaigns to pressure Bahraini authorities to drop the charges and release Rajab.

Furthermore, the active participation of Nabeel Rajab's wife, Sumaya, and his daughter, Malak, played a crucial role as they joined protests and collaborated in advocacy efforts. Their involvement added a personal dimension to the campaign, highlighting the human cost of political detention. Finally, after nearly four years of imprisonment, Nabeel Rajab was released in 2020, marking a significant achievement in the fight for freedom of expression and human rights and underscoring the influence of collective action and global solidarity in the pursuit of justice and human dignity.

This example demonstrates how public awareness and mobilization campaigns can have a real impact on the promotion of human rights and the release of imprisoned defenders. Global collaboration, strategic use of online and offline media, and diplomatic pressure can bring about tangible change in the struggle for justice and freedom around the world.

As we have explored the power of raising awareness, we prepare to move into the next chapter where we will address the essential task of navigating the national legal system in the context of politically motivated detentions, seeking to provide sound guidelines to support the cause of freedom in situations of unjust detention at the national level.

My personal notes





Chapter 10

NAVIGATING THE NATIONAL LEGAL SYSTEM

Since politically motivated detentions are characterized by their arbitrariness and illegality, it is of utmost importance to understand and skillfully maneuver within the legal framework of the country concerned. In this chapter, we will explore how to secure proper legal representation, how to prepare for court proceedings and how to engage in interactions with the authorities. We advise you, as you go through this process, to be patient, but also to operate with a relentless sense of urgency. As far as procedural timelines are concerned, they are rigorous and every day that passes is of significant value.

It is imperative that you explore exhaustively all remedies provided by the national jurisdiction before all relevant instances, even if these appear devoid of legitimacy. Such action is vital for keeping a meticulous record of human rights violations and to guide the relationship with the international justice system in denouncing these transgressions.

Through these methods, you will build the case file. In addition, a collective reparations scheme may eventually emerge as a means to seek justice and compensation for human rights violations, and this file will be useful for that purpose.

Although the exact circumstances will fluctuate depending on the specific legal context, we provide general recommendations that you can mold to suit your particular case. Remember the importance of adhering to the law in all actions taken to support the detainee on their path to freedom.

Adapting to Local Jurisdictions

National law establishes the basic rules for the detention, trial and release of prisoners. A national litigation strategy allows one to work within the legal framework of the country, using the laws and constitutional rights that can be applied to protect the political prisoner. At the national level, there are direct options for challenging detention, such as *habeas corpus*¹⁸ or *writs of amparo*¹⁹, which can be applied quickly and effectively. Each jurisdiction has its particularities. Understanding how the specific legal context and cultural issues may influence the legal process is a key component.

While the defense of the detainee will be exercised by an attorney, those involved in the release strategy should also have a basic understanding of the workings of the national justice system. This will ensure that they can effectively support the attorney, and contribute to informed decision making to strengthen the case and increase the chances of success.

¹⁸ Habeas corpus is a legal remedy used to protect the right to individual liberty of a detained person. It seeks to ensure that a detained person is brought before a court or judicial authority to determine the legality of their detention and to prevent arbitrary or illegal detentions.

¹⁹ The writ of amparo is a legal action used to protect the fundamental rights of a person against possible violations by state authorities or other entities. This recourse seeks to guarantee the respect and protection of human rights in situations where they may be threatened.

Selecting Legal Representation

The selection of a suitable lawyer, who understands both the political nature of the case and the local laws and international instruments, is vital. This involves a detailed search and careful evaluation of their skills, experience and commitment. Take the appropriate time to choose the defense as constantly changing representation can negatively affect the effectiveness of the litigation. Collaboration and ongoing communication with the selected attorney is crucial, as is exploring options for free legal help. Here are some tips to help you make the right choice:

- **Experience and Knowledge:** In addition to being knowledgeable in the national justice system, it is essential that the legal representative has experience and expertise in human rights and international law. This may include, but is not limited to, an understanding of international treaties, relevant jurisprudence, and the ability to argue on behalf of the detainee in a politically charged context. Similarly, it is crucial to choose lawyers who have prior experience in political prisoner cases. This will ensure that they understand the complexity and urgency of the situation.
- **Willingness to Assume Risks:** Counsel should be fully informed and willing to assume the political, personal and economic risks that may arise in representing a political prisoner. This could include persecution, harassment, threats to the lawyer's personal safety and procedural obstacles.
- **Ongoing Communication and Monitoring of the Prison Situation:** The attorney must be committed to maintaining ongoing communication with both the detainee and the detainee's family members. Transparency and open communication are critical to understanding the detainee's needs and concerns and for planning an effective defense strategy.

In addition, the attorney must be willing to conduct regular prison visits that are not only vital for communication with the detainee, but also to monitor the conditions of their detention.

In the event of any violation of the detainee's rights, such as solitary confinement, cruel treatment, torture, or inhuman or degrading conditions of detention, the lawyer or legal team should be prepared to denounce these facts immediately. This may include filing formal complaints, seeking intervention from national or international human rights bodies, and working with the press and civil society organizations to publicize the situation and demand that their rights be respected.

- **Free Legal Assistance:** There are a number of non-governmental organizations and human rights lawyers that provide free legal assistance in cases of politically motivated detentions. Human rights entities often have extensive experience in this type of situation. In addition, in circumstances involving high-profile political prisoners, some lawyers are willing to represent the detainee free of charge because of the relevance of the case and the values it represents.
- **Intervention of Public Officers in Legal Representation:** It is common for some regimes to attempt to force a detainee to be defended by a State lawyer, who may not have as their goal to ensure the rights and guarantees of the detainee. Such interference is a serious violation of the right to defense. Remember that you have the right to choose independent legal representation. Our recommendation is that you choose a lawyer whom you can trust and whose interest is none other than the freedom of the political prisoner.

Preparing the Defense Strategy

Defense preparation requires a thorough understanding of the local legal system. It must include meticulous planning of legal strategy, evidence gathering and witness coordination. This is a collaborative process between the lawyer, the detainee and their family members that requires time, effort and attention to detail. The final say in all decisions must rest with the detainee and their family members.

In all legal interactions and public communications, you should emphasize the unlawful and arbitrary nature of the detention, stressing that it is against constitutional and fundamental rights.

Here are some practical tips for each aspect of the preparation:

- **Political and Legal Context Assessment:** Research and understand the interaction between the legal system and the political regime in question. Identify judges, prosecutors and other key actors who influence the case. If there is bias or conflict of interest on the part of the officials involved in the case, denounce them and make a record of it. Remember that it is your duty to pursue all legal actions at your disposal even if the remedies are not effective.
- **Scenario Forecasting:** Plan for multiple scenarios and develop a sound legal strategy that can be adapted as the case evolves. This may include discrediting fabricated evidence, challenging justice officials, using international law and appealing decisions.
- **Collection and Preservation of Evidence:** Document every detail from the beginning, even if it seems insignificant. Keep a logbook (see Chapter 2). Use photocopies, photographs, and secure data storage to preserve original evidence.
- **Witness Preparation:** Make sure that witnesses understand the process and the importance of their role. Respect the limits set by the law of each country regarding the relationship with witnesses. Consider witness protection if there is a risk of intimidation.
- **Working with Human Rights Organizations and Diplomatic Corps:** It is essential to establish links with human rights organizations, both local and international, and with diplomatic entities that can offer support, either by acting as observers during the trial or by providing human rights expertise. If the detainee has dual nationality, it is crucial to involve the diplomatic team of

their other nationality, as they can contribute significantly to the defense of their rights, thus reducing the chances of impunity on the part of the state.

- **Public Communications Management:** Simultaneously, it is prudent to design a public relations strategy to manage the media narrative as the case progresses, aligned with the national litigation. If feasible, collaborate with a communications expert; if not, coordinate with counsel to select the spokesperson. For more recommendations on narrative building and communications management, refer to Chapters 6, 7 and 8.
- **Consideration of International Resources:** Develop in parallel an effective international litigation and advocacy strategy that is aligned with the domestic litigation strategy. The combination of these strategies provides a holistic and multifaceted approach to addressing the complex and delicate task of freeing a political prisoner. We will address this point in more detail in the following chapter.
- **Detainee and Family Emotional Preparedness:** Seek ongoing emotional support and have a clear understanding of the process to minimize uncertainty and stress. Consider the support of a mental health professional. See Chapter 4 for more information on this topic.
- **Evaluating and Adjusting Strategy:** Preparing for the defense of a political prisoner is not a linear process and may require reevaluating and adjusting strategy as the case progresses. Collaboration, flexibility, and preparation by the detainee, their attorneys, and all defense allies are essential. All must be prepared to meet the unique challenges that can arise in a highly politicized and hostile environment.

Interacting with Authorities

Facing detention for political reasons is an endurance test for both the detainee and their loved ones and advocates. Interacting with authorities in such circumstances requires a combination of respect, knowledge,

fortitude and strategy. The following set of recommendations provides a structured guide for navigating the complexities of these interactions, with the goal of protecting the detainee's rights, maintaining effective communication and promoting justice in a challenging environment.

- **Respect and Professionalism:** Maintaining a respectful and professional tone in all interactions with authorities can help avoid unnecessary confrontations and maintain an open channel of communication. Respect is not a concession of weakness, but a manifestation of dignity and professionalism. It should not be confused with submission or acceptance of injustice.
- **Legal Knowledge:** A command of both local and international law is an armor against arbitrariness. With a solid knowledge of the law, one can dialogue from a position of strength and clarity, challenging injustices with legal arguments rather than emotions.
- **Effective Communication:** Be clear and direct in communications. Always keep in mind the detainee's legal rights. Stick to the narrative and demand the release of the political prisoner.
- **Rigorous Documentation of Interactions:** Every encounter, phone call or written communication with authorities should be meticulously documented, including dates, times, names of participants and a detailed description of what was discussed. This documentation provides a timeline and a record that can be crucial for holding authorities accountable in the future and for providing evidence in legal proceedings. You can make use of the logbook for this record (See Chapter 2).
- **Negotiating with Caution:** Negotiating with authorities requires a balance between firmness in defending rights and flexibility in achieving the detainee's freedom. Be mindful of power dynamics and be aware of when and how to press. Any concessions or agreements should be carefully considered and discussed with other members of the legal team, the detainee and family members.

- **Preparing for Intimidation or Hostility:** In the setting of politically motivated detentions, intimidation and hostility from authorities are common tactics. Remaining calm, responding firmly and respectfully, and documenting and reporting every incident is crucial. The support of human rights organizations, the media and international bodies can counter impunity and intimidation by the authorities, providing visibility to the case and exerting public pressure that promotes justice and the rights of the detainee.
- **Avoid Confrontations:** Confrontations with state authorities can escalate the situation and put the detainee and their family at risk. Remaining calm and seeking diplomatic solutions can be more effective in ensuring the rights and safety of the detainee. Focusing on the facts and the law will help avoid provocations and maintain a strong posture. Do not let confrontations distract you from your goal: the freedom of the political prisoner.
- **Official Channels:** Using official channels for communication and complaints not only legitimizes claims, but also establishes a precedent of respect for institutions, even when they are corrupt. We advise making formal requests for information about the status of the detainee and the process, preferably in writing, as it can help establish a formal record of interactions and ensure that authorities are complying with their legal obligations.

The struggle for justice in an autocratic state is an arduous and often dangerous path. However, armed with respect, legal knowledge, effective communication and external support, one can challenge oppression and work toward the detainee's release. These recommendations serve as a framework for interacting with authorities in a way that preserves the dignity and rights of the detainee while promoting justice. At every step of the way, meticulous documentation, cautious negotiation, and preparation to deal with intimidation and hostility are crucial. By adhering to these principles and maintaining a strategic and respectful approach, one can navigate the maze of authoritarian bureaucracy and work toward a just and humane outcome.

Ethical Considerations and Compliance with the Law

Acting within the law is a guiding principle in this process. Ethical dilemmas must be approached with care and reflection, always maintaining the integrity of the liberation effort.

- **Responsibility to the Detainee:** The welfare of the detainee must be the primary consideration. This means acting in their best interest, even when there may be external pressures or conflicting agendas.
- **Adherence to the Law:** Although the circumstances may be exceptional, adherence to the law is imperative. Any deviation can have serious legal consequences and damage the cause.
- **Respect for Human Rights:** Counsel and advocates for political detainees must strictly adhere to international human rights standards. This includes respect for the dignity and privacy of all parties involved.
- **Transparency:** Honesty and openness with all stakeholders is crucial. This includes being clear about intentions, methods and objectives. Transparency helps build trust and avoid misunderstandings.
- **Confidentiality:** Sensitive information, such as the detainee's personal details or legal strategy, should be handled with extreme caution. Improper disclosure may jeopardize the detainee's safety and compromise the case.
- **Consistency in Speech and Action:** Ensure that all communications and actions are consistent with established ethical principles. Any discrepancy can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the effort.
- **Avoid Conflict of Interest:** If there is any conflict of interest between the parties involved, it should be identified and properly addressed. Unresolved conflicts can hinder the cause.

Example

In the 1960s, the United States was in the midst of profound social and political change due to the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr., a visionary leader, emerged as a central figure in the civil rights movement, which sought to end racial segregation and systemic discrimination affecting the African American population in the country. In his tireless pursuit of equality and justice, King often led peaceful protests and demonstrations in the southern United States, where racial segregation was most evident. However, this courageous resistance led to his detention on numerous occasions, including one of the most notorious episodes, his detention in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963.

Clarence B. Jones, a respected lawyer and legal advisor to King, stood by his side, providing legal and strategic support. He worked tirelessly to ensure that King's legal rights were respected in a legal system often hostile to civil rights leaders. Jones was involved in organizing King's legal defense, gathering evidence and arguments that helped demonstrate the unjust nature of the detentions. Furthermore, Jones contributed to mobilizing public opinion and pressuring local and federal authorities to release Martin Luther King Jr. His skills in communication and public relations were crucial in keeping attention on King's case, which, in turn, generated growing national and international support for his release.

Clarence B. Jones not only worked on the ground but also engaged in negotiations and dialogues with political leaders and government officials on behalf of King and the civil rights movement. His ability to hold constructive conversations and seek peaceful solutions was a crucial part of the movement's efforts to push for legal reforms and end racial segregation.

This example illustrates how understanding and effectively navigating the national legal system can be critical to the release of political prisoners. Careful selection of legal representation, meticulous planning of defense strategy, and strategic interaction with authorities are essential steps in the fight for justice and freedom in situations of political detention. Remember that each case is unique, but the general recommendations provided in this chapter can be adapted and applied to maximize the chances of success in any specific legal context.

As we turn to the next chapter, we dive into a deeper approach: the International Litigation and Advocacy Strategy. We will explore how this strategy extends our quest for justice and liberation beyond national borders. We will address diplomacy, international agreements and legal mechanisms to raise the voice of political prisoners globally. Each step strengthens a global support network in defense of human rights, as we build a bridge between oppression and liberation.

My personal notes





Chapter 11

INTERNATIONAL LITIGATION AND ADVOCACY STRATEGY

In seeking justice for a political prisoner, the strategy of litigation and advocacy is not only limited to national borders. The international community plays a vital role in the promotion and protection of human rights, and can be an essential ally in the release of a detainee. In this chapter we offer you a detailed guide on how to develop an international litigation and advocacy strategy to ensure a comprehensive defense and a comprehensive strategy for the release of the political prisoner. To do this, we will begin by giving you some definitions.

International litigation focuses on challenging the legality of the detention of a political prisoner in an international context. This involves presenting arguments and evidence before specialized international human rights mechanisms that have the capacity to assess and decide on the legality of such detention and other human rights violations associated with the case. This is a powerful tool for seeking justice and the release of those who have been

unjustly detained because of their political activities, as there are universal and regional human rights protection mechanisms that can be of great help.

International advocacy refers to the efforts and strategies that an individual, organization, government, group of human rights defenders or other actors undertake to influence policies, practices or decisions at the international level. International advocacy is not limited to legal aspects but encompasses activities such as policy advocacy, mobilizing support, building alliances, and lobbying key actors, such as governments or international organizations, to bring about changes favorable to the cause being advocated.

International litigation and advocacy offer various options that can be explored depending on the conventions and treaties ratified by the State in question, the nature of the violation, the evidence available, and the possibilities of obtaining an effective remedy. Thus, the universal and regional human rights systems work together in a joint and complementary manner to promote and protect human rights around the world. Indeed, sometimes several international mechanisms can be applied at the same time, but there are occasions when one action rules out the other. This strategic choice will depend on the circumstances and feasibility in each case.

Conducting an effective international litigation strategy is no easy task. It requires expertise in international law and human rights, as well as a thorough understanding of the available international mechanisms and how they work. For these reasons, it is essential to collaborate with specialized international law and human rights organizations, lawyers and other experts with experience in these fields to implement the strategy. These allies can work free of charge and provide legal guidance, strategic advice and additional resources to strengthen the case presented to international bodies. Don't be intimidated by the location of these bodies, many of the complaints and advocacy activities can be handled electronically.

It is important to understand that your international lawyer may be different from your domestic lawyer. What is important is that both strategies are coordinated. The international litigation and advocacy strategy for the release of a political prisoner should not be an isolated effort, but rather

a coherent, complementary and simultaneous extension of the national strategy. The combination of these strategies can significantly strengthen the detainee's defense and increase the chances of success.

Universal Human Rights System

United Nations (UN):

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Human Rights Committee
- Committee Against Torture
- Human Rights Council
- Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
- Working Group on Enforced Disappearances
- Committee on Enforced Disappearances
- Special Rapporteurships (anti-torture, women, judicial independence)

Regional Human Rights Systems

Europe:

- Council of Europe:
 - European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)
 - Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

Americas:

- Organization of American States (OAS):
 - Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACtHR)
 - Inter-American Court of Human Rights

Africa:

- African Union (AU):
 - African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
 - African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
 - Court of Justice

Asia:

- ASEAN:
 - ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights

International Litigation Mechanisms:

The following is an illustrative list of international litigation mechanisms you can start with:

- **Communications:** There are United Nations international mechanisms for reporting cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances. These include the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD)²⁰, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances²¹, and Special Rapporteurs²². These communications serve as a powerful tool to obtain recognition of the arbitrariness of detention and other human rights violations, seeking to pressure the responsible State to release the unjustly detained person and guarantee their rights.
- **Petitions:** Petitions serve to hold the State accountable for human rights violations. Petitions can be submitted to various international bodies, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACtHR), the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the Committee against Torture²³, and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances²⁴, among others. Each has jurisdiction over certain types of cases and geographic regions. Through the use of this tool, both the political prisoner and their next of kin could have access to full reparation²⁵ for the damages suffered.

²⁰ Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/es/special-procedures/wg-arbitrary-detention>

²¹ Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/es/special-procedures/wg-disappearances>

²² Special Reports.

Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/es/special-procedures-human-rights-council>

²³ Committee Against Torture. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/es/treaty-bodies/cat>

²⁴ Committee Against Enforced Disappearances.

Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/es/treaty-bodies/ced/introduction-committee-enforced-disappearances#:~:text=El%20Comit%C3%A9%20contra%20la%20Desaparici%20Desaparici%C3%B3n,Forzadas%20por%20sus%20Estados%20Partes>

²⁵ Comprehensive reparation is a set of actions aimed at restoring the rights and well-being of direct and indirect victims of human rights violations. It goes beyond financial

- **Precautionary Measures (CM)**²⁶: Request precautionary measures before international bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or IACtHR, in cases of risk to life, personal integrity, delicate health or risk of torture, which may result in immediate protection for the detainee.

International Advocacy Mechanisms:

- **Support from Governments of Democratic Countries:** Democratic countries can exert diplomatic pressure on the government of the country detaining the political prisoner. This may include tabling resolutions in specific legislative bodies such as the Foreign Affairs or Human Rights Committee, public calls for the release of the detainee, and diplomatic measures to increase pressure on the government responsible.
- **Meetings with Public Figures:** Organize meetings with public figures, including those from different political positions. These meetings can help highlight the universal importance of justice and human rights, across political divides, and can generate pressure from diverse ideological perspectives for the detainee's release. For example, you can ask a member of parliament or an artist to make a public appeal on social media, write an op-ed, deliver a speech, or initiate a study in their legislature. This is an effective strategy to mobilize international support in the case of a political prisoner.

compensation and addresses aspects such as restitution of property, medical and psychological rehabilitation, and measures to prevent future violations.

²⁶ ECtHR. Precautionary Measures.

Available at: https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/FS_Interim_measures_SPA_.On_Precautionary_Measures. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jspForm/?File=es/cidh/decisiones/mc/sobre-cautelares.asp#:~:text=A%20cautelar%20measure%20is%20one%20of%20suffering%20a%20damage%20of%20C3%B1or%20irreparable>. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): http://www.courtecowas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Protocol_AP1791_ENG.pdf

- **Participation in International Forums:**²⁷ Participation in international forums is a unique opportunity to expose the situation of the political prisoner at a global level, bringing together political leaders, human rights experts, representatives of international organizations and media from around the world. This allows to highlight the injustice of detention, mobilize global support and establish strategic alliances in the fight for human rights.
- **Opinion Articles:** Publishing opinion pieces in international media outlets can raise awareness of the political prisoner's situation. These op-eds can expose the injustice of detention, highlight fundamental human rights principles, and call for action. Careful preparation of an Op-ed and its publication in relevant media can influence public opinion and pressure relevant actors to take action.
- **Advocacy Work in Parliaments and Congresses:** Advocacy in parliaments and congresses of other countries involves advocating for the adoption of specific resolutions and political strategies in relation to the case of the political prisoner. This may include the presentation of motions or resolutions condemning the arbitrary detention, calling for the release of the detainee, or sanctioning those responsible. By working with legislators, formal political support can be garnered to put pressure on governments and help maintain attention on the case. Moreover, these political actions can have a lasting impact and contribute to significant legal and policy changes. We suggest that you do not limit yourself to working with legislators of a specific ideology, as human rights violations affect everyone, regardless of their political affiliation.
- **Targeted Sanctions:** You can ask the government of other countries to make strategic use of targeted sanctions against officials responsible for human rights violations. They can take measures such as denying them entry to the country where the sanction is

²⁷ Some conferences are: Oslo Freedom Forum, Forum 2000 in Prague, World Economic Forum, Thompson Reuters Foundation in London, UNWatch Geneva Summit, Atlas Dinner, Atlas Conference, Concordia, among others.

issued and freezing their assets abroad. This tactic puts pressure on perpetrators of human rights violations by threatening their reputation and personal resources.

- **Participation in Events of Multilateral Bodies and International Courts:** Participation in events of multilateral bodies, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations (UN), the Assembly of States Parties of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other regional mechanisms, is an important part of the international advocacy strategy in the struggle for the release of political prisoners. These events can take various forms, such as thematic hearings, working sessions, conferences and debates, and provide a crucial platform for highlighting the situation of political prisoners and promoting concrete actions, as well as seeking the promotion of resolutions and declarations condemning these detentions and demanding the release of detainees.

Practical Advice

- **Seek Technical and Legal Support:** Collaborate with organizations specializing in international law and human rights, or with lawyers specializing in international law and other experts who can advise you on litigation strategy and international advocacy. Remember that they can provide free assistance.
- **Exhaustion of Domestic Remedies:** In the process of bringing a case before international human rights bodies, the exhaustion of domestic remedies is considered a crucial step in building a strong and effective case. However, it is important to note that this requirement to exhaust domestic remedies may vary depending on the mechanism used. While petitions usually require exhaustion of domestic remedies, other mechanisms such as precautionary measures or communications do not necessarily require it. For more details on this aspect, see the previous chapter.

- **Detainee Authorization:** If the detainee is able to give consent, it is essential to obtain their authorization to file a complaint on their behalf with international bodies. Otherwise, any close family member can do so on his or her behalf, and it is important to explain the reason for not having the detainee's consent or direct authorization. In some cases, this may imply another violation of their rights, for example, denial of access to a lawyer.
- **Drafting a Technical Report:** We suggest that your lawyer draft a technical report (*white paper*²⁸) that aims to provide a complete understanding of the situation, including information on the circumstances of the detention, relevant laws and regulations, the political context, human rights violations, international support received so far (if any), and solid legal arguments supporting the release of the political prisoner. You can take this tool to all advocacy spaces to support your cause.
- **Constant Monitoring and Follow-up:** Maintain constant monitoring of the action you have taken to ensure that it is progressing properly. Do not be intimidated by the complexity or distance involved in international litigation. These mechanisms are designed to serve victims of human rights violations and, in most cases, offer the option of filing complaints electronically. The same applies to advocacy spaces that can be accessed virtually.
- **Confidentiality:** Anonymous disclosure can be an effective strategy for exposing human rights abuses and violations without putting those providing the information at risk. However, it is important to consider that these mechanisms do not offer confidentiality to direct victims, as the State must know who is being advocated for. The safety and protection of informants should be a priority when considering this option.

²⁸ A white paper is a detailed, technical document used to provide information, analysis, arguments and recommendations on a specific topic.

Example

In Saudi Arabia, following the detention of Raif Badawi, an influential blogger and free speech advocate, his family and lawyers implemented an international litigation strategy to secure his release. Raif Badawi was detained for expressing critical views on political and religious issues on his blog.

Raif Badawi's lawyers, along with human rights organizations, joined together to file a petition with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. In the petition, they argued that Raif Badawi's detention was arbitrary and violated his fundamental rights to freedom of expression and opinion.

The international litigation strategy also included submitting detailed reports on Raif Badawi's case to international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. These reports highlighted the conditions of his detention and the abuses he faced, which increased international pressure on the Saudi authorities.

In addition, Raif Badawi's family and his lawyers worked together with influential figures and international political leaders to advocate for his release. Events and conferences were organized in different countries to highlight his case and to urge the Saudi authorities to end his detention.

The combination of international litigation efforts, social media awareness and diplomatic pressure finally paid off. After years of detention and international campaigns, Raif Badawi was released and reunited with his family.

This example demonstrates how a well-planned and executed international litigation and advocacy strategy can make a difference in the fight for justice and the release of a political prisoner. Global collaboration, social media awareness and diplomatic pressure can trigger positive change and contribute to the defense of human rights around the world. Remember that each situation is unique, but the tools and recommendations provided in this chapter can be adapted and applied to maximize the impact of your efforts in cases of political detention.

My personal notes

My personal notes





Chapter 12

PATHWAY TO FREEDOM: A MESSAGE FOR THOSE WHO STRUGGLE AND THOSE WHO HAVE TRIUMPHED

To all those who have felt or feel the weight of chains, who have experienced or experience the darkness of a cell, and who fight courageously for the light of freedom, this message is for you. To those who have accompanied, from a distance or from close proximity, a political prisoner in their struggle for justice, this message is also for you.

Nelson Mandela, after spending 27 years in prison, left us invaluable lessons about resilience, perseverance and the true essence of freedom. He taught us that “to be free is not only to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” Furthermore, Mandela reminded us that “the true test of our devotion to freedom is not measured by the ease with which we obtain it, but by the price we are willing to pay to maintain it.”

Freedom, as you well know, is not simply the absence of physical chains. It is a state of mind, a condition of the soul. Whoever fights for the freedom of a political prisoner, fights for the freedom of all political prisoners and the reconstruction of democracy. This is a fundamental principle that must guide our path. Every individual victory is a collective triumph, and every challenge faced is a reminder of the importance of our shared mission.

The pathway to freedom is arduous and tortuous. Each step requires sacrifice, endurance and an unwavering faith in justice and humanity. But once that threshold is crossed, or while in the process, it is essential to remember that the struggle does not end with liberation. As Gene Sharp wrote, “the struggle for freedom is, in essence, an ongoing struggle.” The real battle is both inside and outside the bars of a cell, where the challenges are different but equally complex.

The freedom that some have won, and that others seek, must be defended and nurtured. Democracy, which is the soul of freedom, is fragile and requires our constant vigilance. Do not underestimate the challenges that will arise. There will be those who will try to silence you or discredit your struggle. There will be times when you will feel discouraged or tempted to give in to complacency. But always remember that freedom, once sought and won, is a treasure to be protected with courage and determination.

The release of one political prisoner is a triumph, but it is also a reminder that there are many others still languishing behind bars, waiting for their moment of justice. We cannot, we must not, forget them. Our struggle is for all of them, and for all those who in the future may be silenced for their beliefs or their activism.

The reconstruction of democracy is a collective task. It requires the active participation of every citizen, of every free soul or soul in search of freedom. It is an ongoing process that demands commitment, education and action. Each of us has a role to play in this reconstruction.

In conclusion, celebrate this moment of liberation, yearn for freedom if you have not yet achieved it, but do not forget that it is only a chapter in the larger book of our struggle for justice and democracy. Freedom is a journey, not a destination. And in this journey, every step, every action, and every voice counts. Let us go forward with determination, with hope and with the certainty that, together, we can build a freer and more just world for all.

May the light of justice always illuminate the pathway to freedom.

In a world where autocracies employ politically motivated detentions as a tool to silence dissenting voices, it is common to feel helpless and alone. But history has shown that resistance and the struggle for justice are unstoppable forces, and the experiences of those who have faced these adversities are testament to the indomitable human will.

This handbook is an essential compilation of advice, strategies and testimonies. It brings together the voices of political prisoners, family members, lawyers, activists and experts from diverse fields, all united in their commitment to justice and freedom.

Although politically motivated detention may operate outside the law, the determination for justice and freedom shines bright. You are not alone in this struggle. In these pages you will find the tools, support and inspiration you need to chart your own Pathway to Freedom.

