

**A 12-Point Guide**  
**for Good Practice**  
**in the Training and Education**  
**for Human Rights**  
**of Government Officials**

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this document is to outline those basic elements which are fundamental to implement an effective human rights training program. It is a blueprint for good practice and the foundation for monitoring and evaluating training and educational programs on human rights for government officials.

An increasing number of institutions, including government agencies and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), are organizing human rights training programs. Amnesty International has observed that some of these programs lack serious prior analysis of the situation; use outdated training methodological approaches; lack solid integration with reform efforts or provide very little, if any, long-term follow up to ensure substantial improvements in the human rights situation.

Amnesty International aims to contribute to the human rights training efforts of governments and IGO agencies by providing a user-friendly guide to good practice in the training and education for human rights of government officials, including the security forces.

This guide is also meant to assist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academics working in this field by proposing a shared code of good practice to be implemented at all levels and continuously enhanced .

Amnesty International would like to acknowledge the help and support received by many human rights defenders from different walks of life in formulating this *12-Point Guide for Good Practice in the Training and Education for Human Rights of Government Officials* and welcomes any further feedback.

### **A definition** **of education\training for human rights**

For any training or educational program to be consistent with human rights principles it has to provide knowledge and information about human rights and also seek to develop attitudes and behaviour respectful of those rights.

To achieve a meaningful effect the educational program needs to be sustained over a period of time, involve direct and constant interaction between the trainers and the trainee, and include practical, hands on learning.

There should be a clear commitment to in-service training which includes human rights issues, and field performance should be measured in accordance with human rights standards. In other words, the application of professional goals and ethics should be made consistent with human rights principles and theory.

Any training program in tune with human rights principles should also include the development of basic skills such as critical thinking, communication skills, problem-solving and negotiation, all of which are essential for the effective implementation of human rights standards.

In some cases it might be necessary to implement separate human rights courses to compensate for the lack of any previous training on these issues, but ideally human rights concepts and values should be an integral part of all teaching practices and courses.

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*1) - Prior assessment of the human rights situation is absolutely vital.*

Before starting a human rights training program it is essential to determine whether it is feasible in light of the human rights situation in the particular country.

A needs-assessment should also be carried out so as to identify priority objectives and determine the scope and approach of the program. The human rights problems faced by civil society should be a determining factor of the kind of training to be provided and the government institutions which should be involved.

In some cases the prior-assessment may conclude that training does not make sense as an initial step due to the seriousness and nature of the human rights violations taking place -- for example because there is a pattern of impunity or because human rights violations are committed by military or paramilitary groups which training could not reach, or when the ministry in question is in such disarray that other steps are needed before the introduction of human rights issues into the curricula can be made effective.

In such cases it may be considered inappropriate to provided training to national officials until laws which fail to satisfy minimum international and regional standards are amended or repealed, prison conditions improved or certain types of security forces (such as paramilitary groups) abolished.

Lobbying, including training on how to carry out legislative changes, may be more constructive than general training on human rights issues in a first instance -- training could even be counter-productive if the circumstances are not appropriate.

Even in the worst of situations the above considerations should not preclude the need to implement human rights awareness raising campaigns which, for example, may include public seminars or round tables that point out the need for human rights development and consistency with human rights norms.

**2) - *Human rights education should be one step towards achieving greater accountability.***

Human rights training will be most effective where the authorities are committed to upholding human rights standards and government officials are open to scrutiny.

In a country where human rights violations are systematic, unless the government undertakes to change its overall policy in relation to human rights, training runs the risk of becoming just a drop in the ocean. Several governments have boasted about their training programs but these do not seem to have led to an improvement in the overall human rights situation in the country. Governments should assume the responsibility to provide quality programs, support, adequate resources and follow-up.

Human rights training will not be effective if developed in isolation; instead training must be one more step towards achieving greater accountability. Government officials should be made aware that their conduct cannot evade scrutiny by agreeing to initiate training programs.

Governments should also give visible signs of their commitment to human rights. For example by supporting changes in the legislation, allowing freedom of expression and association, initiating their own events and backing events in support of human rights organized by social groups, or by implementing nationwide public education campaigns on human rights.

In some cases human rights training conferences and seminars could play a key role in bringing about reforms by stimulating carefully targeted groups. For example, jurists and politicians both have high public visibility and participate in decision-making which affects the application of human rights standards.

Training and education should be part of a comprehensive human rights strategy and fit into a broader framework of human rights reform.

**3) - *Officials should commit themselves to implementing the training program as an essential part of their profession.***

The adequacy of training programs and the integration of human rights concerns into the curricula is the overall responsibility of the government. The implementation of human rights standards must be critical factors in determining promotion and assignments.

The relevant officials should be assigned and assume responsibility for the overall administration of human rights programs and must have support at the highest possible level. It might be preferable to first make changes in the local legislation to ensure the commitment of the authorities and the long-term sustainability of the human rights education (HRE) program.

**4) - *The training program must be coordinated with other human rights activities in the government institutions and in the community.***

Human rights training programs should not just provide one-off training courses for selected officials but should establish a sound national training structure and contribute to the creation of a national culture of respect for human rights, involving both the sector in question and those sectors of society it is supposed to serve. For example, the police as well as social workers, in countries where there are children living on the streets, should be encouraged to engage in dialogue with the children so as to gain better understanding of the needs and difficulties they face, and at the same time tackle prejudices which often are at the root of violent responses.

***5) - Non-governmental organizations should play a key role at all stages of the training program.***

When determining the suitability of the country for human rights training it is of crucial importance to consult with local NGOs over the objectives, and the design of the program, in the administration and follow-up of the program and in the evaluation of the program. It could prove extremely valuable to involve NGO trainers so that much needed dialogue with the government can be established - in this way fomenting a new and different partnership within what until now might have been a relationship of aggression and mistrust.

Where NGOs cannot or will not undertake to train, they should be invited to sit in on the training courses to ensure openness and to enable them to make constructive comments for improvement and to remind the government of its responsibility to ensure that training will have an impact on the daily work practices of officials and in the lives of those in the community they serve.

At the same time, it is important to ensure the impartiality and professionalism of those NGOs involved and when appropriate offer them opportunities to enhance their own skills in this field.

***6) - Target groups for training and the goals of the course need to be carefully identified.***

There can be different approaches and the one adopted will depend on the context in which the training is to be developed - gravity of the violations, the specific country, and other key factors.

Some examples:

\* One approach would be to guarantee that only entire units or divisions would be trained, to ensure that each participant takes the training seriously and to avoid the problem of negative peer pressure when the individual trainee returns to his or her unit. Unit training can make follow-up easier and enable unit and commander or head of division performance easier to evaluate and easier to take into account in promotions and transfers.

\* Another approach would be to start by only training the trainers (i.e. trainers from military or police academies or law faculty professors), these trainers then participating in the training of the rest of the unit or department. In both cases it is important that human rights training has become or is in the process of becoming a permanent and integrated part of the training curricula for the specific force or branch (supported by the necessary legislative changes).

\* A third approach would be to balance training entire units and training a cross-section of officials or trainers. The rationale behind such a mixture would be that when there is a cross-section of trained officials they would reach out for solidarity with others. One possible format under this approach would be to combine national and regional workshops.

Certain specific issues might also need to be targeted during the course to cover particular human rights violations committed by the group being trained.

**7) - *Trainers should have some connection with the target group.***

It makes sense to use trainers who have some connection with the target group being trained, for example, when training the police employ trainers with experience within the police force, or when training civil servants invite trainers with direct work experience within the civil service. This will help ensure that the trainers not only command the required respect, but they also understand the difficulties encountered by the trainees in the terrain.

Trainers should be chosen with great care. They must command authority and be impartial. If trainers do not have the necessary pedagogical skills and comparative human rights knowledge, it is questionable whether they should be the preferred choice. The wrong choice of trainers can place into jeopardy the credibility of an entire training program and any confidence building the program may have on restoring public opinion.

The training of trainers from the targeted sectors as well as from relevant NGOs is important so as to ensure that a larger and professional pool of trainers is available. Preliminary work may be necessary to encourage their participation as well as the development of their training skills and human rights knowledge.

**8) - *The teaching methods used should respect the local cultural and religious realities as well as reflect the human rights aims of the training.***

Teaching methods need to be adjusted to the particular country, the group being trained and the human rights violations which have occurred or are in danger of occurring in that country. Teaching methods have to be sensitive to cultural and religious practices without sacrificing human rights standards and they need to be accessible to the audience to be effective.

**9) - *The training should be practically oriented and involve participatory learning techniques.***

Judges should be asked to decide hypothetical cases at mock trials or appeals, as relevant. Police should be asked to carry out crowd control exercises, mock arrests and interrogation sessions with difficult "subjects" and be asked to react when they see ill-treatment occurring or other violations in a demonstration by fellow students.

Trainers should **avoid** methods such as when teaching about torture, giving examples of torture techniques used around the world, and then telling students that these methods are wrong. It is **preferable** to discuss the fact that human rights violations are international, regional and national crimes subject to punishment.

**10) - *The teaching materials should be practically oriented.***

The materials have to be made available to participants as far in advance of the training sessions as possible. Each set of materials should include complete texts of the relevant international,

regional and national standards (these will vary with the target group) in the appropriate languages. In many countries, however, the majority of the population, including members of the security forces, are illiterate; other materials will have to be developed to ensure that the essence of the principles is imparted.

Where relevant, literacy programs should be a long-range goal for any professional training program, providing a solid framework for any human rights training component.

*11) - Follow-up must be integrated into the training program from the beginning.*

No program should ever be conducted without effective follow-up. Follow-up programs should offer support and when necessary advice to the local trainers and educational\training policy makers, ensuring continuity and high standards.

Possible follow-up techniques include reunions of persons trained, a newsletter about the implementation of training programs (exchange of experiences), activity reports or evaluation reports and contact with participants after training programs to check on progress in implementing what was learned.

*12) - There must be continuous evaluation of the impact of the program and revision in light of identified short-comings and new opportunities.*

It is important that criteria on which the program is to be evaluated as well as who is to do the evaluation are built in to the program from the start.

Such evaluation must not only be done by the trainers, the trainees and the government unit heads, but by **an independent body** (such as a NGO or an academic institution) which can carry out an objective evaluation of the program's effectiveness, and provide appropriate recommendations. The implementation of such recommendations also needs to be monitored both by the governmental body in question and by civil society, as well as international agencies.

Each participant should commit himself or herself to taking some practical step to use the training. For example, prosecutors should report what steps they took to investigate each complaint or report of torture or ill-treatment and explain how that was consistent with the training program. This will be crucial in having a concrete impact in improving the human rights situation and taking permanent steps towards the construction of a culture of human rights and development.

The government should assess work related performance to determine whether the recipients are complying with human rights standards and accordingly reward those who adhere to them and sanction those who do not. Human rights training should not be a window-dressing.

Summary

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## *of Government Officials*

1. Prior assessment of the human rights situation is absolutely vital.
2. Human rights education should be one step towards achieving greater accountability.
3. Officials should commit themselves to implementing the training program as an essential part of their profession.
4. The training program must be coordinated with other human rights activities in the institution and the community.
5. Non-governmental organizations should play a key role at all stages of the training program.
6. Target groups for training and the goal of the course need to be carefully identified.
7. Trainers should have some connection with the target group.
8. The teaching methods used should respect the local cultural and religious realities as well as reflect the human rights aims of the training.
9. The training should be practically oriented and involve participatory learning techniques.
10. The teaching materials should be practically oriented.
11. Follow-up must be integrated into the training program from the beginning.
12. *There must be continuous evaluation of the impact of the program and revision in light of identified short-comings and new opportunities.*