AN INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS TOOLKIT

My Human Rights Have Been Violated. What Can I Do?

A practical guide to seeking justice through UN and regional human rights mechanisms

JUST ACCESS e.V.

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Can International Human Rights Law Help Me?

A Simple Guide for Victims Seeking Justice Beyond National Borders

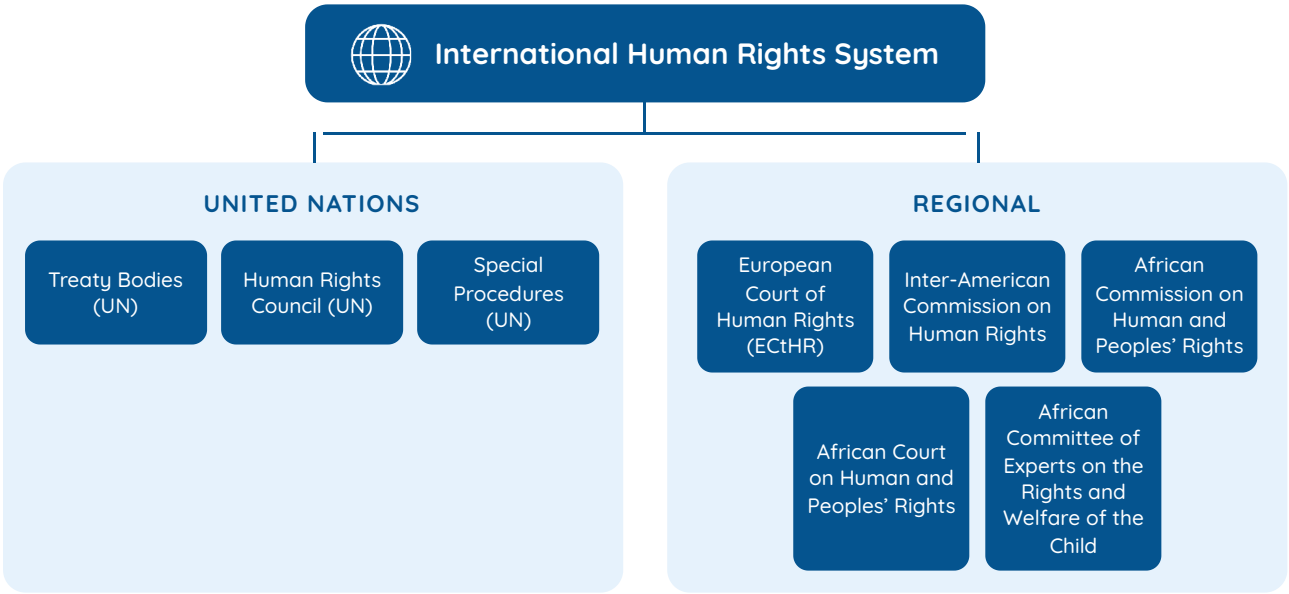
About this Guide

Written for victims of human rights violations who cannot access justice nationally

Explains how to seek justice through international mechanisms

Does not require advanced English or legal knowledge

What Mechanisms are Covered?



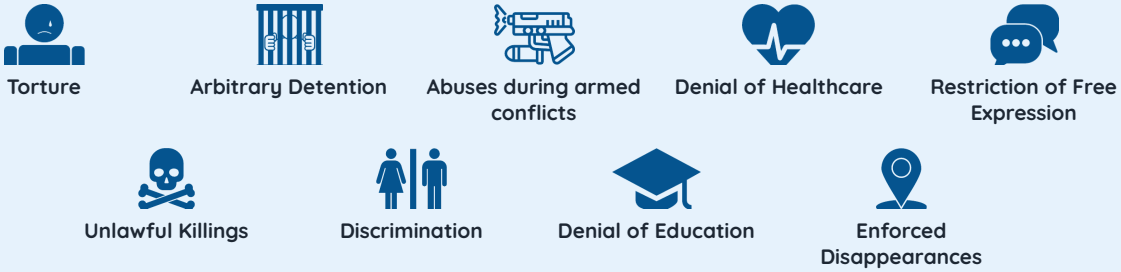
Important things to know

- This guide focuses on **international mechanisms** which deal with **individual complaints** and is not intended to be a full list of available legal tools.
- The information in this guide seeks to provide a **first orientation** to international justice for victims and is **not a replacement for legal advice.**
- Each mechanism in this guide has its own **rules and exceptions** regarding what complaints it takes. Check the official website of the mechanism you are considering for further detail.
- The information in this guide **is subject to change.**

What actually is international human rights law?

International human rights law is a **body of international obligations** imposed on **states** to protect the rights and freedoms of **individuals**. These are generally contained in **thematic global human rights treaties** like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, or the Convention against Torture, for example. They are also contained in **regional treaties** like the European Convention on Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights.

Examples of Human Rights Violations



How are human rights protected beyond States?

Human rights at the international level are protected through the work of **expert oversight bodies**, **international courts**, **diplomatic agents** and **global civil society**. These all work in different ways to identify, investigate, track, and intervene in human rights violations.

This guide focuses on situations where an **individual or group of individuals** is seeking justice for **specific violations** of their human rights, and have **failed to find it at the state level.** Every mechanism here can receive **submissions from individuals** (or someone acting for them). Some then rule on your individual case, while others take up your information to press the State, without deciding your case.

What can international human rights mechanisms do for me?

While each mechanism has a different focus and purpose, the general goals are to:

Facilitate **access to justice** where remedies are **unavailable** and/or ineffective at the national level

Officially recognise violations and affirm victims' rights by **issuing findings, recommendations, or binding judgments** (depending on the mechanism)

Order or recommend reparations, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition

Call for immediate preventative measures to be taken in **emergency situations**

Support truth-seeking, documentation, and **long-term accountability processes**

Generate **international scrutiny** and **increase** political and diplomatic **pressure** for violations to be addressed

When can I use international human rights mechanisms?

- You are an **individual** or **group of individuals** that has **directly suffered a breach** of your human rights under the relevant treaty. Sometimes, **third parties** can also represent victims with their **consent**.
- That breach was caused by a **state.**
- That state has **ratified the relevant treaty** + **accepted the individual complaints procedure** of the specific mechanism. (We'll show you how to check that in each mechanism card.)
- Your complaint is submitted within the **time limit** set by that mechanism, if there is one.
- You have tried to obtain justice through **all relevant administrative and judicial processes in the country** where your human rights were violated, and appealed to the highest body. This is not required if:
  - No **relevant processes** exist
  - The processes **do not work** to deliver justice
  - There are **unreasonable delays**

  It is also **not required** if you are submitting your complaint through the Special Procedures.
- Usually, your case **cannot currently be being examined or awaiting examination** by another international mechanism. Exceptions apply for some mechanisms.

How to Use This Guide



Understand your situation



Review the mechanism comparison table



Check which one fits your case



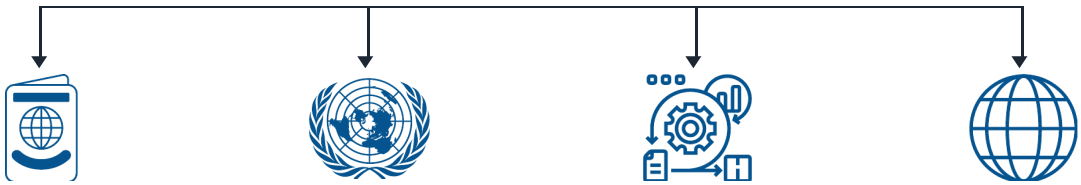
Read the appropriate mechanism card(s)



Get support before taking action

How should I choose the right mechanism?

In general, there are **four paths to justice** at the international level:



1. UN Treaty Bodies (Individual Complaints)

Best for:

- Specific human rights incidents
- Court-like review of your case
- Obtaining specific recommendations from the UN to the state about reparations

Limitations

- Requires that domestic remedies have been exhausted
- State must have accepted complaint procedure
- Decisions are non-binding

2. UN Human Rights Council (Patterns of violations)

Best for:

- Alerting the UN to serious patterns of violations
- Obtaining investigations into the State
- Obtaining expert assistance and cooperation for the State
- Putting pressure on the State to fix patterns

Limitations

- Relies on political dialogue with States
- Does not result in specific decisions on whether your rights have been breached
- Does not directly lead to reparations

3. UN Special Procedures (Expert Intervention)

Best for:

- Ongoing, urgent violations
- No exhaustion requirement
- No treaty ratification required

Limitations

- Cannot issue binding decisions or compel a State to act (no enforcement power)
- Will not formally rule that a violation occurred, or award compensation
- Depends on State cooperation

4. Regional Mechanisms (Regional courts and commissions)

Best for:

- Individual violations of regional treaties
- Obtaining binding judgments from regional Courts, or recommendations from Commissions
- Obtaining orders for reparations

Limitations

- Only for victims in certain regions
- State must have signed the treaty and accepted complaint procedure

The most effective mechanism for you depends on **which of your human rights were breached**, **where** you are, **who** you are, what **time limits** you can meet and **what you expect** from bringing your complaint to an international body.

Comparison Table

	UN Treaty Bodies	UN Human Rights Council	UN Special Procedures	Regional Bodies
Main purpose	Decides individual complaints	Address consistent patterns of serious violations	Provide expert advice and urgent action	Provide justice for violations in your region
Type	Quasi-judicial	Political body	Expert mechanism	Quasi-judicial/judicial
Geographical scope	The countries who have ratified the respective UN treaty & accepted the complaint procedures	Any UN Member State	Global	The countries who have ratified the respective regional treaty & accepted the complaint procedures
Who can submit information?	Usually victims, groups of victims and third parties acting on their behalf	Individuals, groups of individuals and third parties acting on their behalf	Individuals, groups of individuals and third parties acting on their behalf, inter-governmental and state bodies	Usually individuals, groups of individuals and third parties acting on their behalf (if recognised by the regional body); inter-governmental and state bodies
Exhaust domestic remedies first?	Usually yes (exceptions apply)	Usually yes (exceptions apply)	No	Usually yes (exceptions apply)
Outcome	Views & Recommendations	Recommendations & Reports	Recommendations, Communications & Reports	Judgements & decisions

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Last things to know before you start



You may need to provide detailed information about **traumatic events**, which may require **psychosocial support**. This is not usually provided for by the judicial process.



International procedures generally **complement, rather than replace**, domestic justice systems.



Justice systems **work slowly**. Proceedings may take **several years.**



Many mechanisms depend on **state cooperation** for the enforcement of human rights, which may be limited.



While the reporting process is **free of charge**, victims who participate in proceedings will normally **not receive any form of compensation for legal fees**.



Just Access e.V. can provide **free guidance and/or assistance** if you are thinking of submitting a complaint.

UN Treaty Bodies

UN Treaty Bodies are **committees of independent experts** that monitor implementation of the core UN human rights treaties.

They are responsible for **making sure that countries follow the rights contained in the treaties** and for **reviewing complaints** made against those countries. Some Treaty Bodies can receive complaints from individuals against States that have accepted the relevant complaint procedure. They will be covered in this section.

While each mechanism has its own specific rules of admissibility and follows different procedural steps, the **common approach is as follows**. Once you have submitted a complaint, the responsible Committee will:

- Officially register your complaint submission;
- Review the admissibility of your case;
- Communicate your complaint to the involved State for comment. If the Committee decides that your complaint is admissible, it will continue reviewing the substance of your case;
- Obtain further observations from you and the State;
- Make a decision and inform you about the outcomes of your complaint.

> → Make sure you have **read the official guidance** on what you need to submit a complaint here: **Individual Communications Procedures of Treaty Bodies**

United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC)



Rights Covered

Rights in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR).

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline for submitting a complaint, although best to do it as soon as possible.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 1-3 years.
- Can result in compensation, protection from deportation, investigation and prosecution, law and policy changes and others

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the First Optional Protocol to the CCPR. Check here

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we **recommend contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you are considering submitting information.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm, you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken while your case is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The complaint procedure is **confidential**, but the Committee's final decision will be **published**. You may ask for your identity to be **kept secret from the public**, but **not from the UN or the concerned State**.

States **must protect complainants and witnesses** from intimidation and ill-treatment, but this obligation is **not always enforced**.

Q What happens after the complaint is decided?

A If the Committee finds a violation, it makes **recommendations** to the State to repair the situation. The State **must report what it has done usually within a few months**. The Committee **follows up** if needed.

If the Committee does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)



Rights Covered

Rights in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Key Deadlines

Complaint must be brought within **1 year** of exhausting domestic remedies.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 2-5 years.
- Can result in compensation, protection measures, investigation and prosecution, law and policy changes and others

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR. Check here

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we **recommend contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you are considering submitting information.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm, you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken while your case is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The complaint procedure is **confidential**, but the Committee's final decision will be **published**. You may ask for your identity to be **kept secret from the public**, but **not from the UN or the concerned State**.

States **must protect complainants and witnesses** from intimidation and ill-treatment, but this obligation is **not always enforced**.

Q What happens after the complaint is decided?

A If the Committee finds a violation, it makes **recommendations** to the State to repair the situation. The State **must report what it has done usually within a few months**. The Committee **follows up** if needed.

If the Committee does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)



Rights Covered

Rights in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

Key Deadlines

Complaint must be brought within **6 months** of exhausting domestic remedies.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 2-5 years.
- Can result in compensation, law and policy changes, release of a detained person and others

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the CERD and accepted the complaint procedure under Art. 14. Check here

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we **recommend contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you are considering submitting information.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm, you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken while your case is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The complaint procedure is **confidential**, but the Committee's final decision will be **published**. You may ask for your identity to be **kept secret from the public**, but **not from the UN or the concerned State**.

States **must protect complainants and witnesses** from intimidation and ill-treatment, but this obligation is **not always enforced**.

Q What happens after the complaint is decided?

A If the Committee finds a violation, it makes **recommendations** to the State to repair the situation. The State **must report what it has done usually within a few months**. The Committee **follows up** if needed.

If the Committee does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)



Rights Covered

Rights in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline for submitting a complaint, although best to do it as soon as possible.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 2-5 years.
- Can result in compensation, law and policy changes, release of a detained person and others.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW. Check here

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we **recommend contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you are considering submitting information.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm, you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken while your case is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The complaint procedure is **confidential**, but the Committee's final decision will be **published**. You may ask for your identity to be **kept secret from the public**, but **not from the UN or the concerned State**.

States **must protect complainants and witnesses** from intimidation and ill-treatment, but this obligation is **not always enforced**.

Q What happens after the complaint is decided?

A If the Committee finds a violation, it makes **recommendations** to the State to repair the situation. The State **must report what it has done usually within a few months**. The Committee **follows up** if needed.

If the Committee does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

United Nations Committee Against Torture (UNCAT)



Rights Covered

Rights in the UN Convention against Torture (CAT).

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline for submitting a complaint, although best to do it as soon as possible.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 1-3 years.
- Can result in compensation, protection from deportation, investigation and prosecution, law and policy changes and others

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the CAT and accepted the complaint procedure. Check here

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, and the process is entirely **free**. Still, for complex cases, we recommend **contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you are considering submitting a complaint.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm (for example, of torture or deportation), you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken. UNCAT may ask the State to pause the deportation, give you access to medical care, or otherwise protect you from intimidation while your case is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The complaint procedure is **confidential**, but the UNCAT's final decision will be **published**. You may ask for your identity to be **kept secret from the public**, but **not from the UN or the concerned State**.

States **must protect complainants and witnesses** from intimidation and ill-treatment under the CAT, but this obligation is **not always upheld**. The Committee **cannot directly enforce its orders.**

Q What happens after the complaint is decided?

A If UNCAT finds a violation, the Committee makes **recommendations** to the State to repair the situation. The State **must report what it has done usually within a few months**. The Committee **follows up** if needed.

If UNCAT does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)



Rights Covered

Rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Key Deadlines

Complaint must be brought within **1 year** of exhausting domestic remedies.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes several years.
- Can result in compensation, law and policy changes, release of a detained person and others.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Rights of the Child. Check here

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, and the process is entirely **free**. Still, for complex cases, we recommend **contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you are considering submitting a complaint.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm (for example, of torture or deportation), you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The complaint procedure is **confidential**, but the Committee's final decision will be **published**. You may ask for your identity to be **kept secret from the public**, but **not from the UN or the concerned State**.

States **must protect complainants and witnesses** from intimidation and ill-treatment under the CRC, but this obligation is **not always upheld**. The Committee **cannot directly enforce its orders.**

Q What happens after the complaint is decided?

A If the Committee finds a violation, it makes **recommendations** to the State to repair the situation. The State **must report what it has done usually within a few months**. The Committee **follows up** if needed.

If the Committee does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

Rights Covered

Rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline for submitting a complaint, although best to do it as soon as possible.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 2-4 years.
- Can result in views and recommendations to the violating State.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRPD. Check here

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, and the process is entirely **free**. Still, for complex cases, we recommend **contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you are considering submitting a complaint.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm (for example, of torture or deportation), you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The complaint procedure is **confidential**, but the Committee's final decision will be **published**. You may ask for your identity to be **kept secret from the public**, but **not from the UN or the concerned State.**

States **must protect complainants and witnesses** from intimidation and ill-treatment, but this obligation is **not always enforced.**

Q What happens after the complaint is decided?

A If the Committee finds a violation, the Committee makes **recommendations** to the State to repair the situation. The State **must report what it has done within 6 months**. The Committee **follows up** if needed.

If the Committee does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)

Rights Covered

Rights in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED).

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline for submitting a complaint, although best to do it as soon as possible.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes several years.
- Can result in observations and recommendations to the State concerned.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have accepted the necessary decision under Art. 31 of the CED. Check here

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, and the process is entirely **free**. Still, for complex cases, we recommend **contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you are considering submitting a complaint.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm (for example, of torture or deportation), you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken. You can also submit an Article 30 urgent action request asking the Committee to immediately seek and find a disappeared person. This is faster and applies to all State parties without needing an Art. 31 declaration.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The complaint procedure is **confidential**, but the Committee's final decision will be **published**. You may ask for your identity to be **kept secret from the public**, but **not from the UN or the concerned State**.

States **must protect complainants and witnesses** from intimidation and ill-treatment under the CED, but this obligation is **not always upheld**. The Committee **cannot directly enforce its orders.**

Q What happens after the complaint is decided?

A If the Committee finds a violation, the Committee makes **recommendations** to the State to repair the situation.

If the Committee does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

UN Human Rights Council

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is the body **at the highest level of the UN human rights machinery**. Its complaint mechanism is different to the Treaty Body mechanisms for several reasons.

- First, it is the only universal complaint procedure **addressing all human rights and all fundamental freedoms in all United Nations Member States**.
- Secondly, the UNHRC's complaint mechanism aims to **track consistent patterns** of gross and reliably attested human rights violations, not decide the merits of individual incidents.
- Thirdly, as opposed to the Treaty Bodies which function in an almost court-like manner, the UNHRC is a **political mechanism** which monitors patterns of human rights violations within States and then cooperates with them to bring an end to these.

> → Make sure you have **read the official guidance** for submitting a complaint here: complaints.ohchr.org



United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)



Rights Covered

All human rights and fundamental freedoms

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline. You must first try the courts and other legal options in your own country, unless they are ineffective or take unreasonably long.

Possible Outcomes

- Looks at patterns of serious violations, not individual cases
- Can lead to confidential dialogue with the State, an independent expert monitoring the situation, or technical assistance
- Cannot award compensation or remedies to individuals

Geographical Scope

All 193 Member States. No treaty ratification needed.

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent
- Inter-governmental entity
- National human rights bodies

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A No, and the process is entirely free. Still, we recommend **contacting Just Access e.V.** or a **trusted legal support organisation** if you are considering submitting a complaint.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A This procedure is **not designed for urgent cases** and has no fixed timeline. If you are in immediate danger, consider the **UN Special Procedures** (p. 19), which can act quickly.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The procedure is **confidential**. You can ask for your identity **not to be shared** with the State concerned, but **your complaint cannot be anonymous to the UN**. In exceptional cases, the Council may make a matter public.

Q What happens after I submitted information?

A Two working groups **review** it and may **send it to the State** for a response. If it shows a pattern of serious violations, the Council can **keep it under review**, appoint an **independent expert**, **discuss it publicly** or **recommend technical assistance**. You will be informed at key stages.

UN Special Procedures

The **Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council** foresee the appointment of independent human rights experts who provide their advice either on thematic or country-specific human rights issues.

They can **visit a specific country** where human rights violations occur, or **receive information directly from victims**, lawyers and civil society organisations which they may **send** as **urgent communications** to states, intergovernmental organisations, businesses, military or security companies. They also **share their reports and recommendations** with the Human Rights Council as well as the **UN General Assembly.**

Because the Special Procedures are not a court or a court-like process, they **have simpler and more flexible rules**. For example, you do not have to finish all local court cases or appeals before making a complaint. Also, the State does not have to be a party to a specific human rights treaty for the experts to take action.

> → Make sure you have **read the official guidance** for submitting information to the UN Special Procedures here: **spsubmission.ohchr.org**



Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council

Rights Covered

- Past human rights violations
- On-going or potential human rights violation
- Bills, legislation, policies or practices that do not comply with international human rights law and standards.

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline for submitting information

Possible Outcomes

- Bring international attention to the case and encourage action.
- They are not a court and cannot enforce their recommendations.

Geographical Scope

Global

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Third Parties with Victims' Consent
- Inter-governmental entity
- National human rights bodies

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we recommend **contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you consider submitting information.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If the experts consider your situation credible, serious and urgent, they strive to act quickly, often within **24 hours**. But the UN and its **experts cannot provide physical protection** to people who report human rights violations through this process.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A The submission procedure is **confidential**, but your identity is by **default shared with the concerned State**. However, if this could put you at risk, make sure to inform the experts in your submission who may then decide not to include the name when contacting the authorities.

Q What happens after I submitted information?

A The experts strive to **act quickly**, especially in serious and urgent cases. If the UN Special Procedures consider your information **credible**, they can ask the government to respond and encourage it to investigate, stop human rights violations, and provide a remedy. However, they **cannot force the government to act** or make legally binding decisions.

Regional Human Rights Mechanisms

Alongside the United Nations human rights system, several regions of the world have developed their own treaties and institutions to protect human rights. The most established are the following:

- European Court of Human Rights
- Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights
- African Commission and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
- African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

These mechanisms share a common purpose: they **allow individuals to bring complaints** about human rights violations committed by a state, once all effective remedies within that state have been exhausted. This **"exhaustion of domestic remedies"** requirement means victims generally must first try to resolve their case through national courts or authorities before turning to the regional body.

Regional mechanisms typically offer several advantages for victims:

- Legal reasoning grounded in **shared regional context**, so judges and commissioners often understand the specific political, social, and legal traditions of the region, which can lead to **more contextually informed decisions.**
- Remedies beyond compensation: decisions can require states to change laws, investigate crimes, provide guarantees of non-repetition, or take other measures to prevent future violations.

As victims usually **cannot** bring the **same case to a UN treaty body and a regional mechanism** at the same time, it is important to understand which avenue fits a given case. The practical value of these mechanisms lies in offering an additional, often **more accessible**, layer of accountability when domestic systems fail to provide justice. This adds another way to hold the State responsible for human rights violations in a way that is easier to access than other options.



European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)

Rights Covered

Rights in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Key Deadlines

A complaint must be lodged within 4 months of having received the final national decision, or 4 months since incident happened if no procedure was capable of rectifying the situation.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes between 3 and 7 years.
- A binding order demanding the state to take individual measures (e.g. releasing a prisoner), general measures (e.g. changing the law), and/or grant the victim a lump sum of money.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the ECHR. Check here.

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- NGOs
- Private companies and associations

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A While not mandatory, getting legal assistance is **strongly advised** for ECtHR applications, as those submitted without legal assistance face **higher rejection rates. Consider contacting Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organization for help with your application.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm (for example, of death or deportation), you can ask for **'interim measures'** to be taken. If granted, the ECtHR will request the State to take **temporary protective measures** for you and others involved in your case until it is decided, such as the suspension of a deportation order.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A Information on cases submitted to the ECtHR are **open to the public** throughout the proceedings. You may exceptionally ask for **your identity to be kept secret from the public**, but not from the Court or the concerned State.

States **are strictly prohibited** from **hindering** applicants' access to the Court and/or **intimidating** them or their support system throughout the case. Although this obligation is legally binding, it is not always respected.

Q What happens after the case is decided?

A If the ECtHR finds a violation, it will issue a final judgment on reparations. States have **3 months** to comply with any compensation order, and **6 months** to submit '**Action Plans** 'for remedies to the Council of Europe. The Council **cannot directly enforce** the Court's decisions, this depends on **State cooperation and political pressure**. If the ECtHR does not find a violation, it **informs** you and the State of its decision. You may only appeal this decision in **highly exceptional circumstances**.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)



Rights Covered

Rights in the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (ADHR) and other Inter-American human rights treaties.

Key Deadlines

A complaint must be lodged within **6 months** of having received the final national decision.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes several years.
- The suspension of an act of violation to human rights, investigation and punishment of perpetrators, compensation, changes in law and others.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the ACHR. Check here.
Countries who are members of the OAS and therefore subject to the ADHR. Check here.

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- NGOs

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we recommend contacting **Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you consider submitting information. Moreover, the petitioner does not have to be the victim: any person or group, or an NGO, can lodge a petition on someone's behalf.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If your situation is urgent and serious the IACHR will request the State to take **temporary protective measures** for you and others involved in your case until it is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

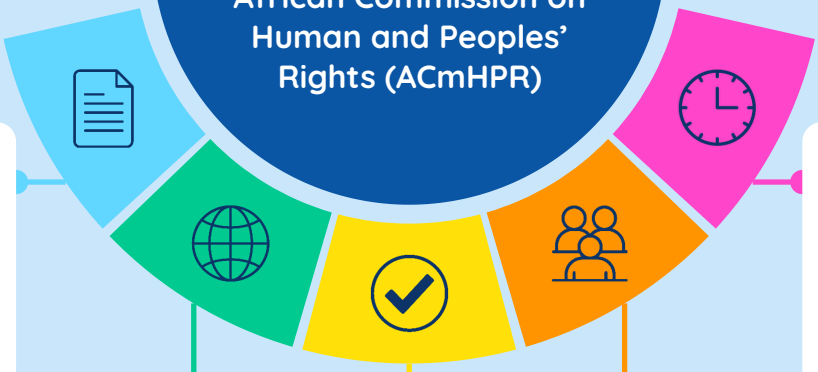
A Information on cases submitted to the IACHR are **open to the public** throughout the proceedings. You may exceptionally ask for **your identity to be kept secret from the public**, but not from the Commission or the concerned State.

States **are strictly prohibited** from **hindering** applicants' access to the Commission and/or **intimidating** them or their support system throughout the case. Although this obligation is legally binding, it is not always respected.

Q What happens after the case is decided?

A If the IACHR finds a violation, it issues a report with remedial recommendations and the State usually has between **2-3 months** to provide information on the measures it has taken to comply with the report. If the **State does not comply** with the requirements, the Commission **may refer the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.**

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACmHPR)



Rights Covered

Rights in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline, but complaint should be submitted within a "**reasonable time**" from the final domestic decision.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 2-5 years.
- Can result in reparation, investigation and prosecution, moral remedies, law and policy reforms, protection measures and other.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the ACHPR. Check here.

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- NGOs

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we recommend contacting **Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you consider submitting information.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm, you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken while your case is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A Information on cases submitted to the ACmHPR is generally confidential until the AU decides otherwise. States **are strictly prohibited** from **hindering** applicants' access to the Commission and/or **intimidating** them or their support system throughout the case. Although this obligation is legally binding, it is not always respected.

Q What happens after the case is decided?

A If the ACmHPR finds a violation, they recommend appropriate remedies to the State, who usually has **180 days** to provide information on the measures it has taken to comply with the report. If the State fails to implement the Commission's recommendations, a **separate complaint under Article 1 ACHPR** can be filed to highlight the failure of compliance. If the Commission does not find a violation, it informs you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.

African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR)

Rights Covered

Rights in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline, but complaint should be submitted within a "**reasonable time**" from the final domestic decision.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 2-5 years.
- Can result in grant reparations or an advisory opinion.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the ACHPR. Check here.

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- State parties
- Individuals and NGOs if (a) the NGO has observer status before the African Commission, and (b) the State has made the special declaration under Article 34(6). Check here)

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we recommend contacting **Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you consider submitting information.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm, you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken while your case is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

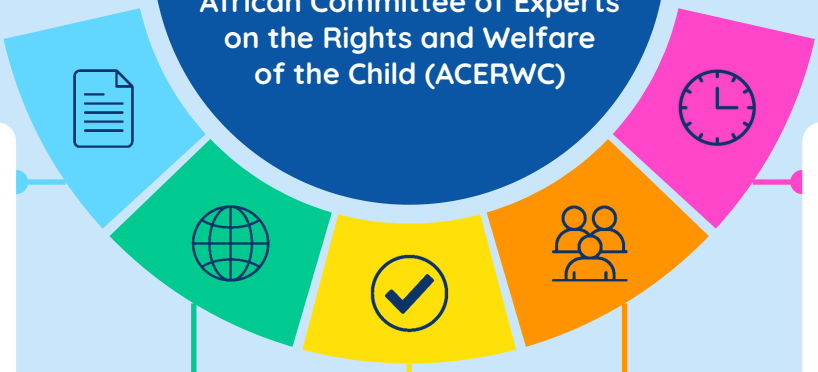
A Information on cases submitted to the AfCHPR are **open to the public** throughout the proceedings. You may exceptionally ask for **your identity to be kept secret from the public**, but not from the Court or the concerned State.

States **are strictly prohibited** from **hindering** applicants' access to the Court and/or **intimidating** them or their support system throughout the case. Although this obligation is legally binding, it is not always respected.

Q What happens after the case is decided?

A If the AfCHPR finds a violation, it issues a **binding judgment** ordering the State to provide appropriate remedies. Under Article 30 of the Court's Protocol, States undertake to **comply** with the judgment and to **report** to the Court on the measures taken to implement it. The judgment is **final** and cannot be appealed, though a party may ask the Court to review it if genuinely **new evidence** emerges.

African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)



Rights Covered

Rights in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline, but complaint should be submitted within a "**reasonable time**" from the final domestic decision.

Possible Outcomes

- Whole process usually takes 2-5 years.
- Can result in compensation, protection measures and/or reparation.

Geographical Scope

Countries who have ratified the ACRWC. Check here.

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- NGOs (recognised by African Union)
- State parties
- National Human Rights Institutions
- United Nations (UN)

Q Do I need a lawyer?

A **No**, individuals can submit information. However, we recommend contacting **Just Access e.V.** or a trusted legal support organisation if you consider submitting information.

Q What if my situation is urgent?

A If you are in immediate danger of harm, you can ask for **emergency protective measures** to be taken while your case is decided.

Q What are potential risks and safety concerns?

A Information on cases submitted to the ACERWC are **open to the public** throughout the proceedings. You may exceptionally ask for **your identity to be kept secret from the public**, but not from the Committee or the concerned State.

States **are strictly prohibited** from **hindering** applicants' access to the Committee and/or **intimidating** them or their support system throughout the case. Although this obligation is legally binding, it is not always respected.

Q What happens after the case is decided?

A If the ACERWC finds a violation, they recommend appropriate remedies to the State, who usually has **180 days** to provide information on the measures it has taken to comply with the report.

If the Committee does not find a violation, it informs you and the State of its decision. You **cannot appeal** this decision.



Any stakeholder interested in exploring collaborations or desiring more information is warmly invited to contact Just Access.

contact@just-access.de

JUST ACCESS e.V.
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