

**PREVENTION TACTICS** Just a little more than a decade ago, human rights organizations focused primarily on denouncing past or ongoing violations. The main tool in the human rights tool box was a hammer, and the major players in human rights work relied on “naming and shaming” countries for documented abuses. While in its own way this is valuable work, the tool box has been dramatically expanded by the many new actors involved in human rights work.

We have seen a striking change in the human rights environment in the last decade. The agenda moved from creating an international legal framework to serious discussions about on-the-ground implementation. At the same time, there has been a shift from international efforts to local work, and local groups often include both intervention and prevention in their goals. A local NGO, for example, might approach the police about a specific case of torture and discuss how to keep it from happening in the future. These groups are using new tactics that weren't available to traditional human rights organizations. They are not only criticizing; they are forming partnerships with government institutions to help reform legislation; they are offering training to police forces and creating curricula; they are making their presence known in crucial ways.

The work of protecting human rights and preventing abuse continues to change, advance and improve. The tactics you will read about in this chapter perhaps will be part of making the next decade even better.

— **Morten Kjaerum**

Director  
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In order to prevent human rights abuses we must recognize when people are in physical danger; when freedom of movement, the right to work or to adequate housing will be curtailed; when a group is in danger of losing its voice in society or a community is in danger of falling into poverty; or when an indigenous way of life is disappearing.

The tactics in this chapter aim to prevent imminent abuse. Sometimes the most effective way to do that is just to be there. The physical presence of others — whether that means one volunteer from a country with a powerful government or a crowd of bystanders who will serve as witnesses — can deter potential abusers.

Sometimes abuse occurs because people don't have the information they need to prevent it. Getting information into the right hands — of those who will be directly affected by the abuse or of others who can mobilize against it — can stop abuse from happening.

And sometimes the best way to preserve human rights is to remove the possibility for abuse. Recognizing the pattern of abuse makes it possible to change the situation, so that abuse is far less likely to occur.

*The tactics in this section are divided into three sections:*

- 1 Physical protection tactics that prevent harm through physical presence.
- 2 Tactics that get critical information into the hands of people who can prevent abuse.
- 3 Tactics that anticipate abuse and create obstacles to stop it.

## PHYSICAL PROTECTION

We can show no greater solidarity

than physically to stand up for — or next to — fellow human beings who are in danger.

The tactics in this section go beyond symbolism, using the physical presence of vol-

unteers to protect the safety of others. This is a relatively simple and powerful idea:

safety in numbers. People or groups who are willing to hurt someone may be unwill-

ing to do so in front of others, fearing witnesses or bad press or the consequences of

harming someone who has the backing of an influential group or government. This

leads to another powerful idea: show that you have friends in high places.

## Bodyguards for Human Rights: Protecting and encouraging endangered human rights activists through the presence of international volunteers.

TACTIC

Peace Brigades International (PBI) sends international observers to accompany human rights activists who are threatened by the government or paramilitary organizations. If they witness abuse, observers alert authorities in the country, their own native government and activists around the world. Knowing they can expect an international response, abusers are deterred from their planned attacks. At the same time, the accompanied activists are empowered to continue and expand their work for human rights. PBI was one of the first to 'institutionalize' the idea of accompaniment, beginning in Guatemala in the early 1980s. PBI currently sustains over 80 volunteers on the ground in Colombia, Indonesia, Mexico and Guatemala.

Although the volunteers themselves are the most visible aspect of this tactic, the tactic's success depends on the actions of many others around the world. The volunteer must be able to attract international attention immediately in the event of an attack or threat. To this end, PBI has networks of activists in the home countries of the volunteers. Additionally, volunteers bring networks of family and friends to their work, and often draw on extensive activist experience and past contacts.

International accompaniment can be difficult for both human rights activists and volunteers, who face constant danger, stress and constraints on their personal lives. PBI places the highest value on the empowerment and encouragement of local grassroots activists, offering accompaniment only upon request and never imposing itself in the internal affairs of those it accompanies.

Read more about this in a tactical notebook available at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org), under Tools for Action, and see *Unarmed Bodyguards: International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights*, by Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren, Kumarian Press, 1997.

ONLINE

This tactic builds on the universal reality that we are all subject to moral and political pressure. National leaders don't want bad press. Low-level killers don't want a witness watching their dirty work. Everyone prefers anonymity in their crimes, and no one wants witnesses. By putting an international witness right in the face of the perpetrators, and simultaneously placing external pressure on the leaders, the attacks are deterred. Meanwhile, by showing threatened activists that international solidarity extends to the point of taking risks right at their side, they are emboldened and strengthened in their courageous work.

Accompaniment has since been used as a tactic in other situations where people are in physical danger and perpetrators of abuse are likely to be swayed by international opinion. Other groups using this tactic include the Nonviolent Peaceforce in Sri Lanka, Christian Peacemaker Teams in the West Bank, the National Organization in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel, the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Colombia, the Centro Fray Bartolome de Las Casas in Mexico, and others.

These dynamics can be used in other settings as well. The symbolic power of church workers or journalists, for instance, often has a protective or calming influence in situations of tension and violence, because perpetrators don't want to be seen misbehaving in such a presence. In Haiti, Partners in Health employs community health workers called *accompagnateurs* who make daily visits to HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis patients, which, in addition to providing medical and emotional support, shows members of the community that they need not fear casual contact with people who have the illness. Here again, the symbol and physical presence of a committed third party carries a moral and social weight that can change behavior.

**How can you focus international attention on your struggle?**

## Plan B: Protecting arrested demonstrators by protesting outside the police stations where they are being detained.

In Serbia, under the Milosevic regime, a group of young activists built on the idea of safety in numbers, using secondary demonstrations to protect members arrested during demonstrations and to render the threat of arrest ineffective. They also used humor and theater to lessen the population's fear of government power.

Otpor! ("Resistance!" in Serbo-Croatian) prepared secondary demonstrations — their "Plan B" — outside police stations to respond immediately to arrests during protest events. The police were less likely to beat or detain the activists, knowing that large crowds and a number of journalists were waiting outside for them, while the activists felt less afraid, thanks to the support they knew they were receiving.

Once arrests occurred, Otpor! put Plan B into action by mobilizing its extensive network of contacts:

- 1 A nearby observer with a mobile phone observed the arrest and determined which police station received the arrested activists.
- 2 Lawyers went immediately to the police station to negotiate for the activists' release.
- 3 Other Otpor! activists gathered, within an hour, in front of the police station and at the organization's office. They played games and sang songs to keep the crowds upbeat, calm and involved. Activists remained outside the police stations until the detainees were released.
- 4 Media contacts went to the police station to report on the protests and take statements from the activists' after they were released.
- 5 Opposition parties condemned the arrest and sent their members to the police station.
- 6 Local NGOs informed international organizations and asked them to condemn the arrests.

Otpor! put substantial time and effort into building a strong, extensive and loyal network that could be mobilized quickly. Extensive planning outlined who would call whom and exactly what each person was to do after the arrests, so that the second demonstration would follow the arrests almost instantaneously. Most contact information for the network was stored on individual members' mobile phones, so that the police could not seize or destroy the information.

Read more about this in a tactical notebook available at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org), under Tools for Action.

Otpor!'s "Plan B" is a fascinating example of a tactic that met the aims described in each section of this workbook. People using this tactic prevented the imminent torture of activists inside the police station. They intervened to stop the ongoing abuses of the Milosevic regime by weakening police power. They helped heal and restore the confidence of protesters who had been arrested, and helped volunteers overcome the fear of being arrested. And the visibility of the demonstrations built awareness of the regime's abuses and the growing democratic resistance movement.

Otpor!'s success depended on a number of critical factors. While the country was suffering under an autocratic regime, Otpor!'s lawyers were still able to meet with the activists and have some influence with the police. Similarly, the police and the regime still feared a large public gathering and international public opinion. In a totally closed society, neither of these things would be true.

### What is your plan B?

“ ” All our arrested activists became heroes. Because they had the support of hundreds of people waiting for them at the station, they were not afraid any more. Competitions started for who was the "most wanted" activist and who got arrested more. We were laughing in the face of the regime and the entire world learned about what was happening to us.

— Zorana Smiljanic, Otpor!, Serbia

PREVENTION	Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue
Physical Protection	Europe	Civil Society	Government	National	Torture

## A Protective Presence: Maintaining a physical presence at the site of potential abuse to monitor and prevent human rights violations.

Throughout the West Bank, Machsom Watch uses the presence of Israeli women to protect Palestinians passing through Israeli checkpoints and ensure that their rights are respected.

Machsom Watch monitors several Israeli checkpoints every morning and afternoon during the periods of highest traffic to protest the checkpoints and to protect the rights of individual Palestinians who must pass through them. All of the volunteers for Machsom Watch (*machsom* means checkpoint in Hebrew) are Israeli women. The organization began in January 2001 with three women and has since grown to 300 volunteers.

Monitors view the checkpoints as a violations of human rights, restricting the Palestinians' right to free movement and hence the right to education, medical treatment and work.

The monitors perform three primary functions at the checkpoints: they prevent abuses, they document abuses that they witness and they show solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The very presence of the Israeli women discourages some soldiers from abusing the people passing through the checkpoints, according to both monitors and Palestinians. When soldiers try to keep people from crossing or to confiscate ID cards, monitors quietly but assertively intervene if they think it could make a difference. When they witness serious violations, monitors often complain to higher-ranking army officials and encourage Palestinians to do the same.

Monitors who witness abuses make detailed reports and publish them on their website. They invite journalists, politicians and others to join them at the checkpoints. And they wear tags that read in Arabic "No to the checkpoints!" This show of support is heartening to many Palestinians, who may not have a positive image of Israelis.

Machsom Watch has faced several challenges in its work. There are many checkpoints and not enough monitors to cover them all. Volunteers admit that the army does not feel committed to report to the monitors, or necessarily acknowledge them. This is exacerbated by the fact that Israeli soldiers are rotated into and out of their positions fairly frequently, so the monitors are not able to develop a relationship with them, and some of the work begins anew with each new rotation of soldiers. So far, Machsom Watch has not succeeded in its broader goal of ending the occupation and the removal of checkpoints. However, it has helped to make the Israeli public and people all over the world more aware of the abuses occurring at the checkpoints.

The physical presence of an individual is often more effective when it is backed by an influential network that can move information quickly to a large number of people or to the right people in key positions of influence. Machsom Watch uses the Internet to share its monitoring experiences more widely and to raise awareness among Israelis and the international community.

**How can you use respected people in your community to assist potential victims of abuse?**

When we arrived at the checkpoint, there were men, women, children, taxis, lorries loaded with produce, an ambulance and also a long line of cars from the other side. As soon as people saw us they rushed towards us as if we were their last hope, each with his own story... We tried all sorts of phone numbers, and finally a jeep arrived with a high-ranking officer. At first he refused to talk to us, saying that we only come to the checkpoints to make trouble for the soldiers and to make an impression... A doctor and his wife who were there had taken their daughter to hospital in Ramallah, and though the border policemen were prepared to let him return home to Hebron, they would not let his wife, as they maintained that she had passed illegally and

her midwife documents were out of date. We kept pleading for some people. We don't know why or at what point the officer softened, but suddenly he gave orders, and everyone started going through. Within five minutes the checkpoint was empty, and there was no checking on the way, but the doctor's wife was left standing and sobbing. The soldiers had taken her ID. Next thing we knew, she had her ID back, and was on her way to join her husband on the other side. As we left, we heard shouting from the other side of the checkpoint, and saw our doctor and other people jumping up and down and waving their arms at us, shouting "Shukran! Shukran!" (Thank you! Thank you!).

— volunteer, Machsom Watch,  
Abu-Dis checkpoint, Israel

Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue	PREVENTION
Asia	Civil Society	Government	Local	Freedom of Movement	Physical Protection