Annual Report 2024

# THE PUBLIC COMMITTEE ACAINST TORTURE IN ISRAEL

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#### TABLE OF CONTENT

_ist of Abbreviations	3
_etters from Leadership	4
About PCATI	7
Context	_8
Legal Framework	_9
Institutionalized Torture in Detention	_10
Police Brutality	_11
Current Situation: Post-October 7th Escalation	_12
PCATI's Response:	
Theory of Change and Three-Pronged Approach	_13
Legal Work	_14
Public Advocacy	17
Forensic Work	21
Looking Forward:	
2025 Challenges and Opportunities	23
Thank you	26

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**DIPI** Department of Internal Police Investigations

**HCJ** High Court of Justice

ICCPR International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

ISF Israel Security Forces

IIC Inspector of Interrogee Complaints

ISA Israeli Security Agency (Shabak)

IPS Israeli Prison Service

MK Member of Knesset

MPCID Military Police Criminal Investigation Division

UNCAT UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

oPt occupied Palestinian territories



#### MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

#### **Rising to Meet History's Call**

2024 tested our organization and our mission like never before. In the wake of October 7th and the subsequent war in Gaza, we witnessed an unprecedented surge in detainees, the emergence of military detention camps, and systematic abuse that shocked even seasoned human rights defenders. Our team faced severe bureaucratic obstacles to prison access, restrictions on legal representation, and a public discourse increasingly marked by dehumanization. Yet throughout, PCATI rose to meet the moment with unwavering determination and remarkable results.

In 2024, we located 550 detainees, conducted 77 prison visits, and received 1,835 inquiries from families about their loved ones. We brought a constitutional petition against the government's proposed expansion of the Unlawful Combatants Law, forcing substantial changes that protect detainees' rights while exposing critical data about detention conditions. Meanwhile, our "Water Cannon" bill, developed with the Zulat Institute, which passed its preliminary reading in early 2025 with cross-party support, will require video documentation of all use of water cannons against protesters—a crucial step toward police accountability.

As we look ahead, we face both risks and opportunities. Global attention on detention conditions in Israel has never been higher, and our staff's determination to protect torture victims has only intensified. The international arena presents mixed signals uncertainty with the new American administration and a European Union increasingly concerned with human rights. Domestically, proposed legislation targeting Israeli human rights organizations may cause PCATI (along with broader Israeli civil society) to spend time and resources on organizational survival. Simultaneously, PCATI stands with the survivors of the Hamas attack on October 7, with the hostages and their families, who were the victims of torture and war crimes. We understand the long path that will be needed for the physical and psychological rehabilitation of all the survivors of the attack. In this complex landscape, PCATI remains committed to our founding mission: eliminating torture through legal advocacy, public engagement, and forensic expertise. We will continue rising to meet whatever challenges lie ahead.

Tal Steiner, CEO

#### MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

#### **Steadfast in Our Mission**

In 2024, PCATI demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of extraordinary challenges. The ongoing war in Gaza, unprecedented numbers of detainees, and government's hostility towards critical NGOs created an environment where human rights work became more crucial—and more difficult—than ever. Our organization not only persevered but achieved significant achievements to improve the situation of vulnerable populations.

During the last year and continuing, we engaged in strategic litigation on issues which emerge in our ongoing contact with imprisoned persons and their families and others enduring institutional violence. We initiated the Hebrew translation of the Istanbul Protocol and were proud to launch it with a well-attended academic conference which addressed many different facets of torture in our area. We continue to teach forensic documentation according to the

Istanbul Protocol and create ever greater circles of professionals knowledgeable in the documentation of and fight against torture.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to our mandate: to continue the fight against torture in all its presentations and against any person, through legal advocacy, public engagement that builds understanding and support for human rights, and forensic expertise that provides the evidence needed for accountability and justice. The challenges of 2025 will be significant, but so is our resolve. With the continued support of our partners, donors, and the broader human rights community, PCATI will continue its vital work of eliminating torture and protecting human dignity in Israel and the oPt.

Bettina Birmanns, Board Chair

#### ABOUT FCATI

PCATI is a non-profit organization founded in 1990 by human rights activists responding to systematic violations of detainees' and prisoners' basic rights, particularly the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment during interrogations and detention. Our mandate is clear: to abolish torture by Israeli authorities through increasing accountability for perpetrators and instituting sustainable safeguards protecting future victims.

As Israel's only organization specifically focused on eliminating torture and ill-treatment by the Israeli Security Agency (ISA), police, and the Israeli Prison Services (IPS), PCATI operates at the intersection of legal advocacy, public policy, and forensic science. Through this comprehensive approach, we work to transform Israel's treatment of detainees and ensure that the prohibition against torture—enshrined in international law—becomes reality in practice.

With this report, we want to highlight our activities, achievements, and challenges during 2024.





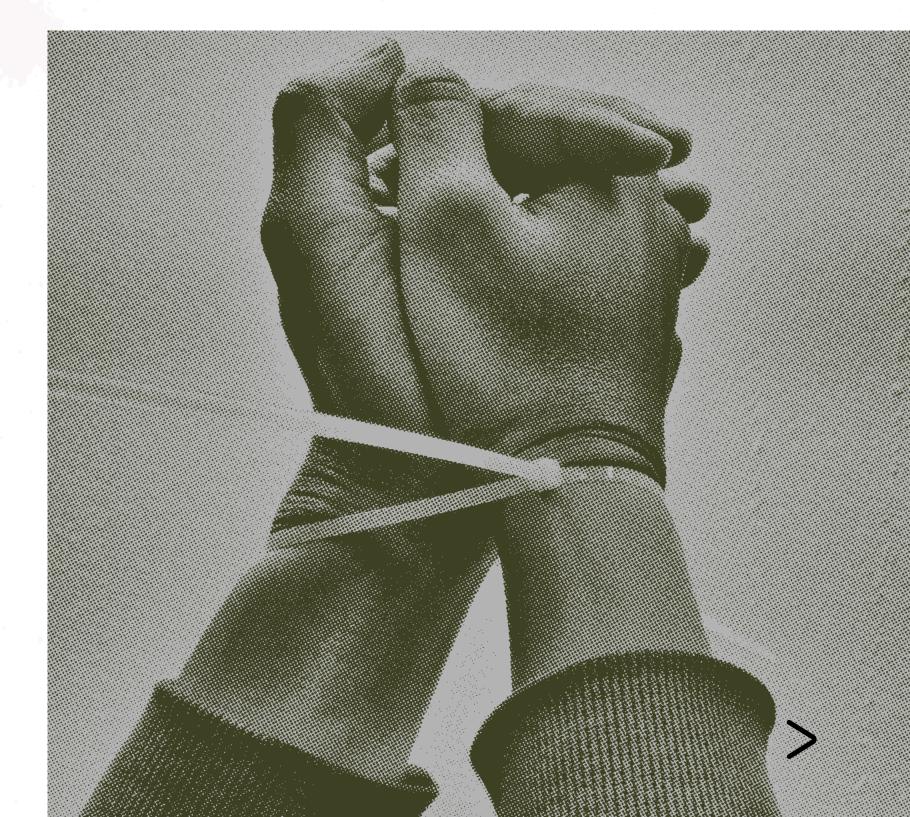
# LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As a signatory to both the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Israel has committed to prohibiting torture and ill-treatment under all circumstances—even during states of war or public emergency. These treaties require effective legislative, administrative, and judicial measures to enforce this prohibition.

However, Israel remains non-compliant with its obligations. No domestic law criminalizes torture or ill-treatment, leaving a vacuum that enables systematic abuse across all Israeli security forces. The erosion of legal protections has accelerated

since the Supreme Court's landmark 1999 ruling in in Public Committee Against Torture in Israel vs. Israel. There, while the Court declared torture as absolutely prohibited and several interrogation methods unlawful, it simultaneously created a "necessity defense" loophole for "ticking bomb"

scenarios, which would exonerate perpetrators retroactively when using "enhanced interrogation techniques". This exception has gradually expanded, undermining the decision's prohibition and enabling the proliferation of torture that continues today.



# INSTITUTIONALIZED TORTURE IN DETENTION

The systematic nature of torture in Israeli detention primarily targets Palestinians from the oPt. Since the beginning of the Israeli occupation, the ISF have conducted extensive arrest campaigns across the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem, targeting Palestinian men, women, and youth. Those arrested

face transportation to military camps in Israel for interrogation by ISF or ISA personnel, and judged by military judges in military courts. In addition to Palestinians, torture has in rare cases also been applied to Israeli citizens suspected of terrorism, such as in the case of Jewish extremists suspected of having set a house on fire in the Palestinian village of Duma, causing the death of several family members.

Nighttime arrests, detention of minors, and incommunicado detention for up to 60 days without seeing a lawyer have become common practices. Some detainees report being taunted, threatened,

beaten, forced into painful stress positions for hours, humiliated, and subjected to sleep deprivation—all designed to extract information about suspected terrorist activities or force confessions of terror acts supposedly committed by the detainee.

The experience of physical and psychological abuse continues in Israeli prisons. Despite Supreme Court rulings requiring minimum living space of 4 square meters per prisoner—already far below international standards—the Israeli Prison Service has failed to comply. Even before the mass arrests which followed October 7th, prisoners faced overcrowded cells, limited access to adequate nutrition and sanitary facilities, and increasingly report beatings, threats, and humiliation by guards. This systematic degradation of human dignity reflects not individual misconduct but institutional policy. This situation has significantly worsened after October 7th.



# POLICE BRUTALITY AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

PCATI's work extends beyond detention and interrogation and includes police brutality affecting Israel's most vulnerable populations. Recent years have witnessed escalating violence between police and citizens, coupled with institutional impunity enabled by the deficient Department of Internal Police Investigations (DIPI). This violence disproportionately affects marginalized communities: Palestinian citizens of Israel, East Jerusalem Palestinians, Bedouins, Jewish citizens of Ethiopian descent, people with disabilities, and the ultra-Orthodox community.



# CURRENT SITUATION: POST-OCTOBER 7TH ESCALATION

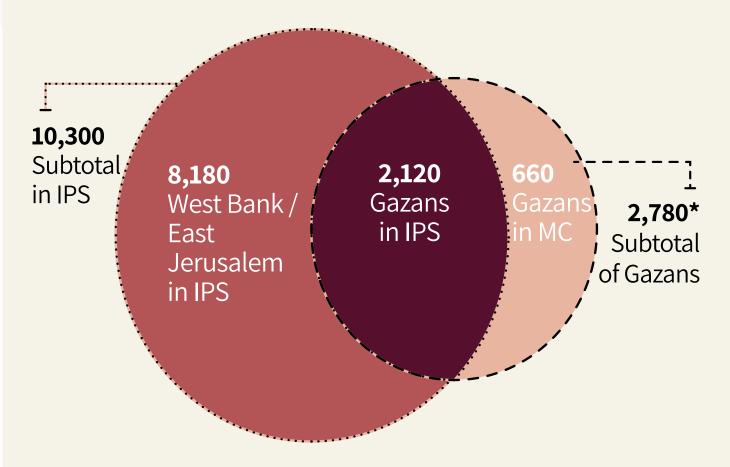
The Hamas-led attacks on October 7th, 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza triggered an unprecedented arrest campaign in both Gaza and the West Bank, creating historically high detention numbers. Moreover, the revelations of systematic abuse and punitive detention policies at military camps like Sde Teiman have shocked the conscience and degraded Israel's standing in the world.

Meanwhile, thousands of Israelis and citizens of other countries — including women, children, and elderly people — were the victims of atrocities and abuse by the Hamas attackers. These actions constitute torture, inhuman and degrading

treatment strictly prohibited in accordance with international law and constitute war crimes.

As the state of war continues, the crisis has intensified existing patterns of abuse. Police violence against protesters has escalated as demonstrations demanding the return of hostages and an end to the war have continued. Meanwhile, the Knesset has abdicated its oversight responsibilities, while attacks on civil society, media, and judiciary have intensified. This convergence of external war and internal repression has created the most challenging environment for human rights work in Israel's history.

#### Over 11,000 Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons / military camps



\* This number is an estimation based on data PCATI received in the latest State response to its petition | HCJ 1414/24 The Public Committee against Torture in Israel et. al vs. The Knesset et. al,. updated response by the State submitted on May 30, 2025.

# PCATI'S THEORY OF CHANGE AND THREEPRONGED ADDROACH

PCATI's work rests on a fundamental belief: transparency and accountability can break cycles of abuse. By documenting violations, bringing cases to justice, and exposing patterns of impunity, we create pressure for systemic change. Our three-pronged approach—legal advocacy, public engagement, and forensic expertise—works synergistically to transform how Israeli institutions treat detainees and respond to allegations of abuse.

# LEGAL

PCATI's lawyers represent individuals who were subjected to violence at the hands of Israeli security forces, filing complaints with state authorities on their behalf, demanding that their cases be investigated, and that perpetrators of such criminal offences be indicted. PCATI also petitions the HCJ on matters of principle concerning use of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment during interrogations; employment of such means by security forces in their interactions with the public; inadequate prison conditions; and other petitions challenging the manner of investigation of such complaints by Israeli authorities, in order to increase accountability and offer victims a chance at justice.

PCATI's advocacy department raises awareness and promotes discussion of matters concerning torture and state violence in Israel and abroad. We work with MKs, government officials and state ministries to promote legislation might reduce and prevent the use of torture, and battle any motions that might increase the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. PCATI also participates in various international forums, raising awareness of the state of torture in Israel and encouraging decision makers around the world to call on Israel to adhere to the norms established in international law, namely the Covenant against Torture, which has been signed and ratified by Israel.

#### FORENSIC TRAINING

PCATI is the only organization in Israel with the means and know-how to conduct professional training and evaluations based on the principles outlined in the "Istanbul Protocol", the main guidelines used in the field, building the capacity of advocates and healthcare professionals to document the torture or abuse claimed by complainants.

# LEGAL WORK: DEFENDING RIGHTS IN CRISIS

#### **Comprehensive Legal Advocacy**

PCATI's legal work typically begins with outreach from a detainee's family to PCATI or another human rights organization, then locating a detainee through engagement with prison services and military authorities. PCATI's lawyers take firsthand testimonies from detainees regarding their arrest and interrogation, and document detainees' health situation and detention conditions. PCATI's field workers maintain contact with a detainee's family to update them on their relative's location and situation.

When evidence supports legal action, we file administrative complaints with relevant authorities—the Inspector of Interogee Complaints (IIC), Israeli Prison Service (IPS), Department of Internal Police Investigations (DIPI), and Military Police Criminal Investigation Division (MPCID). Cases closed without proper investigation or on unjustified grounds trigger appeals processes, with rejected appeals potentially leading to HCJ petitions.

Beyond individual cases, PCATI's fact-gathering identifies patterns of systematic abuse warranting principled litigation. These strategic cases address institutional practices enabling torture, seeking court orders that protect entire categories of detainees rather than individual victims alone.

#### Litigation Focus: Unlawful Combatants Law Challenge

PCATI's most significant 2024 legal victory came through our petition against the government's

#### 2024 Legal Work Impact

77
Prison Visits

**550** 

**Detainee Location** 

1,835
Field Inquiries

16
Individual Complaints

**7**Appeals Submitted

**5** Principled Petitions

proposed fourth amendment to the Unlawful Combatants Law, which would have extended pre-judicial detention to 75 days and denial of access to a lawyer to 90 days. Our litigation achieved substantial modifications, reducing these periods to 45 and 70 days respectively, while exposing critical information about detainee conditions. While this case continues, it demonstrated that even during wartime, constitutional protections can be defended through strategic litigation.

#### A Client's Story: S.A.'s Detention

S.A. is a 43-year-old married father of four who lived in Khan Younis where he worked as a taxi driver. In February 2024, he, together with other men, was taken from the refugee center where he had been staying with his family. He was blindfolded, placed in leg shackles, and periodically interrogated. He received a blow from a soldier on the lower side of his left leg near

the heel, and from that moment, he felt that his leg was numb.

S.A. was ultimately transferred to Sde Teiman and held for 52 days. During that time, he was transferred from one pavilion to another, each no more than 20 meters large and holding about 120 other detainees. During his detention at Sde Teiman, S.A. was subjected to harsh, humiliating, and inhuman conditions. He was blindfolded and forced to kneel from waking up between 5 and 6 in the morning until midnight, he was handcuffed and bound in a forward position, and when brought to a medical examination or interrogation, he was handcuffed in a backwards position and his legs were shackled. The daily awakening was accompanied by shouts and beatings by the soldiers. The continuous handcuffs caused him difficulty while using the toilet, and the bathroom queue was long and toilets smelly and filthy.

During this time, S.A.'s health deteriorated. His injured leg swelled, turned blue and oozed blood and fluid. In the middle of his detention, S.A. was placed under anesthesia without being told, and when he woke up he realized he had undergone surgery. He noticed his left leg was not cuffed, and on looking closer he could see that the bone was exposed. A few days later, S.A. was brought to a civilian hospital. In the middle of the night, an orthopedic doctor arrived with a translator and said to him "Choose either your leg or your life." S.A. called this the most difficult decision of his life, as he was in excruciating pain and humiliation. After his surgery, S.A. was returned to Sde Teiman and treated the same as he had been treated before. At the end of April, S.A. was returned to Gaza.

After his return, S.A. reached out to PCATI about his treatment while in detention and

one of PCATI's lawyers took his testimony. We have submitted a complaint on his behalf and are committed to pursuing justice for S.A. and others like him.

#### **Breaking Through Bureaucratic Barriers**

The bureaucratic obstacles facing PCATI's legal work intensified dramatically in 2024. Military authorities restricted access to detainees, delayed visit approvals, and limited lawyer-client consultation time. Prison services imposed additional security requirements, extended waiting periods, and frequently canceled scheduled visits without explanation. Moreover, as the ICRC has been completely banned from detention sites since October 7th, our ability to access prisons and report our findings has been crucial to understanding detainees' situation. Overcoming these obstacles put pressure on PCATI's resources, however, despite these challenges, our legal team persisted.

#### PUBLIC ADVOCACY: BUILDING PRESSURE FOR CHANGE



#### **National Advocacy Strategy**

PCATI's national advocacy directly engages with Israel's democratic institutions to create policy changes eliminating torture and ill-treatment. We work with Knesset members (MKs) across the political spectrum, government officials, and civil society partners to advance legislation criminalizing torture, strengthen investigative mechanisms, and enhance supervision of security forces.

Our advocacy recognizes that sustainable change requires both decision-maker engagement and grassroots support. We combine direct lobbying with public education, media engagement, and coalition building to build momentum for reform. This multi-level approach proved particularly effective in 2024's polarized political environment.

#### **Legislative Victory: Water Canon Law Advancement**

Working with the Zulat Institute, PCATI achieved a remarkable advocacy success, which led to the Water Canon Law's preliminary reading passage in early 2025. This legislation will require video documentation of all water cannon use against protesters—a crucial accountability measure that emerged from our systematic documentation of police brutality.

The proposal's support across the political spectrum demonstrates that effective advocacy can transcend partisan divisions. By focusing on specific, achievable reforms rather than broad ideological positions, we created space for collaboration among otherwise opposed political factions. This success provides a model for future advocacy efforts in Israel's fractured political landscape.

#### **International Engagement and Diplomacy**

PCATI's international advocacy leverages global attention to Israeli human rights violations, working with diplomatic missions, international organizations, and oversight mechanisms to encourage compliance with international law. Our 2024 international engagement included 35 meetings with diplomatic representatives, 10 comprehensive briefings to the diplomatic community, and 2 advocacy trips to key international forums.

This outreach proved particularly valuable as global attention on Israel intensified following

October 7th. We provided critical context and expertise to international observers seeking to understand the human rights dimensions of the situation, reinforcing PCATI's role as a trusted source for accurate information about detention conditions and abuse patterns. Indeed, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Dr. Alice Jill Edwards, has approached Israel with our data, and Ben Saul, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, has articulated the points that PCATI has raised in connection with the Unlawful Combatants Law.

Joint advocacy mission in Paris with EuroMed Rights,
November 2024



#### **Media Strategy and Public Education**

Media engagement remains central to PCATI's public advocacy, with 85 articles in Hebrew, Arabic, and the international press covering our work and torture-related issues. This coverage ensures our message reaches diverse audiences across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Our media strategy emphasizes evidence-based reporting, providing journalists with documented cases, statistical analysis, and expert commentary — all stemming from our field work and litigation efforts. PCATI is proud to be a reliable source for human rights information during a period of intense media scrutiny and misinformation.

Our work has been featured in <u>Hebrew</u> and <u>Arabic-language</u> publications as well as widereaching forums such as <u>NBC News</u>, <u>CNN</u>, and the <u>Washington Post</u>.











#### The Washington Post Democracy Dies in Darkness

#### Palestinians recount deadly abuse in Israeli prisons: 'It is Guantánamo'

The Post spoke to former Palestinian prisoners and lawyers and reviewed autopsy reports, revealing rampant violence and deprivation in Israel's prison system.

Updated July 29, 2024



## Professional Training and Community Engagement

Beyond policy advocacy, PCATI provides direct training to vulnerable communities and their advocates. In 2024, we conducted four specialized training sessions on mitigating police brutality for activists, LGBTQ+ community members, and asylum seekers. These programs build grassroots capacity for self-protection while aiding us in documenting abuse patterns that inform our broader advocacy work.

# 2024 Public Advocacy Impact

#### **Bills Drafted:**

2 legislative proposals developed

#### **MK Meetings:**

2 meetings with members of the Knesset

#### Position Papers: multiple languages

**5** comprehensive policy analyses published

# Committee Hearings:

4 hearings attended

## **Diplomatic Briefings:**

10 comprehensive reports to international community

#### Media Coverage:

**85** articles across multiple languages and platforms

## **Training Sessions:**

4 community protection programs delivered

#### FCRENSIC WCRK: BUILDING PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY

PCATI's forensic experts are available to clients not just in the detention context, but to anyone who may have been the victim of torture or ill-treatment, including survivors of the October 7th attack and asylum seekers from the oPt and Africa.

Our forensic work builds capacity among medical professionals, mental health practitioners, and legal advocates to properly identify, document, and address torture allegations according to international best practices. By training professionals in standardized documentation techniques, we strengthen the evidentiary foundation necessary for successful legal proceedings.



#### **Establishing the Istanbul Protocol Standard**

PCATI is the leading Israeli organization in the introduction of the Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to Israeli professional audiences and the judiciary. PCATI works to consolidate the status of the Istanbul Protocol



as a recognized and accepted tool in the Israeli legal system.

A November training program attracted 13 participants from medicine, law, mental health, and refugee work, building a cadre of professionals capable of conducting standardized torture assessments.





### Hebrew Translation Launch and Professional Conference

Our 2024 translation of the Istanbul Protocol into Hebrew represents a milestone in Israeli human rights work. The launch conference, attended by over 100 participants from medicine, mental health, law, and refugee advocacy, demonstrated significant professional interest in improving torture documentation standards.

The conference keynote by Dr. Alice Jill Edwards, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, provided international validation for our work, enhanced PCATI's credibility within professional communities, and established momentum for ongoing forensic capacity building.

# Launch of the Hebrew Translation of the Istanbul Protocol, December 2024

#### **Forensic Group Strategic Plan**

PCATI's volunteer Forensic Group, made up of professionals who conduct Istanbul Protocol assessments, met five times during 2024 to discuss training needs, service delivery strategies, how to provide support to October 7th victims of torture, and maintaining professional morale during challenging periods. These sessions addressed both technical skills and emotional resilience, recognizing that torture documentation work requires both competence and psychological support.

The Forensic Group's discussions about serving October 7th victims and returned hostages demonstrate our belief that human rights apply to everyone, regardless of political affiliation or conflict dynamics. This principled approach reinforces PCATI's credibility while ensuring that all torture survivors receive appropriate professional support.

# CHALLENGES AND OFFIRTURITIES

#### **Navigating Political Uncertainty**

The year 2025 presents a complex landscape of risks and opportunities for human rights work in Israel. Despite current leadership's increasing calls for human rights violations, there are also opportunities for civil society influence and coalition building. PCATI's strategic planning recognizes these contradictions, preparing for multiple scenarios while maintaining our core mission focus.

The new American administration's approach to Israeli human rights issues remains unpredictable, potentially affording greater impunity for violations. Meanwhile, the European Union is demonstrating increasing concern about these issues. PCATI's international advocacy will adapt to these changing dynamics while maintaining consistent pressure to comply with international law.

#### The NGO Tax Proposal:

#### **Shrinking Space for Civil Society**

Proposed legislation targeting foreign government funding of civil society organizations poses a real risk to civil society in Israel. The NGO taxation bill, reintroduced in early 2025, is the latest in a series of attempts over the past decade to restrict civil society space in Israel, specifically targeting organizations

critical of government policies regarding the occupation and settlement enterprise. The proposal would tax foreign government donations by 80% and bar courts from "consider[ing] any request submitted by an NGO whose primary funding comes from a foreign state entity if it is not funded by the state." As Israeli human rights organizations are not typically funded by the state, the proposal seeks to cut off access to the courts. This renewed effort to silence human rights defenders takes place in a context of increasing disrespect for the rule of law. We have witnessed increased harassment of human rights lawyers outside courthouses, and inflammatory rhetoric from politicians and anti-democratic groups that seem intended to stifle any criticism of the Israeli government's actions in Gaza or any support for Palestinian rights, and which itself drew criticism from international observers.

PCATI and our civil society colleagues are actively and urgently advocating against these developments. We are working with many MKs who rightly view the taxation bill as political interference with speech and access to courts, and we have pending litigation in the Supreme Court concerning protections for lawyers from harassment, balancing respect for the rule of law with respect for the public's right to protest.

#### **Strengthening Civil Society Cooperation**

Despite external pressures, Israel's human rights community has demonstrated remarkable cohesion and mutual support during this time. This solidarity creates opportunities for collaborative advocacy, resource sharing, and strategic coordination that amplify any individual organization's impact. PCATI's continued engagement with partner organizations strengthens the entire human rights ecosystem. We frequently collaborate on litigation and domestic and international advocacy efforts, pooling resources and co-signing legal petitions, and together with our colleague organizations, we released a joint report on the state of the occupation. In addition to working with Israeli human rights organizations, because our mandate is specific to eliminating torture and ill-treatment, we also participate in similarly-focused international networks such as EuroMed Rights, the International Federation for Human Rights, and the OMCT SOS Stop Torture Network, all of which have greatly supported our advocacy work this past year.

#### **Building on 2024's Achievements**

PCATI's 2024 successes provide momentum for continued progress in 2025. Our legal and political accomplishments, grounded in our day-to-day work, prove that strategic advocacy can succeed even in hostile environments.

Our expanded media presence, strengthened international relationships, and enhanced forensic capacity create platforms for greater impact in the coming year. The global attention focused on Israel provides unprecedented opportunities, while our documented expertise positions PCATI as an authoritative voice in international forums.

#### **Commitment to Mission**

As PCATI enters 2025, we remain committed to our mission: eliminating torture through comprehensive advocacy combining legal action, public engagement, and forensic expertise. The challenges ahead are significant, but so are the opportunities for meaningful change. With continued support from our partners, donors, and the international human rights community, PCATI will continue meeting whatever challenges arise, while maintaining our fundamental commitment to protecting human dignity and ending torture in Israel and the oPt.

# THANK YOU!

PCATI gratefully acknowledges the support of our donors, partners, and the broader human rights community whose solidarity enables our continued work in defense of human dignity and international law.



for USD donations: for NIS donations:



