

# ***Pursuing Justice for Mass Atrocities: A Handbook for Victim Groups***

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

“[Pursuing Justice for Mass Atrocities: A Handbook for Victim Groups](#)” is an educational tool produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Ferencz International Justice Initiative of the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide. The handbook aims to give victim and survivor groups the information they need to make their own decisions about justice and develop their own strategies to pursue it. It does not present a one-size-fits-all approach, nor does it advocate for any specific goal or strategy. Instead, it highlights advantages, disadvantages, and challenges of different outcomes and approaches, and provides advice on how victim groups can navigate them. It also includes the contact information of dozens of experts and resources that can provide more to victim groups advice on these topics. The Handbook aims to give readers the tools they need to make informed decisions about their own justice priorities.

### **Why did we write this Handbook?**

“We want justice.” That has been the unifying sentiment shared with us over the years as we have met with Yezidi, Iraqi Christians, Rohingya, Syrian, Darfuri, and countless other survivors of genocide and related crimes against humanity. They desperately seek justice, but many victims of these crimes lack an understanding of how to pursue it. That is the void this Handbook intends to fill. Modern conceptions of international justice were born out of the ashes of the Holocaust. What is often not realized is that survivors played little to no role in the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. The Tribunal’s cases grappled with the horrors endured by millions. Yet virtually no Jews or other victims of German crimes were part of the proceedings. In the rare instances since then where international criminal justice has been pursued, this model has persisted, with victims laboring to have their voices heard. More often than not, formal justice is a fleeting hope. This Handbook was designed as a practical guide to educate victims in ways they can champion their cause in their own voice.

### **Who is the Handbook for?**

We wrote this Handbook for **victim groups** around the world that have experienced genocide and related crimes against humanity and that want to play a leading role in the quest for justice, peace, and social healing. In particular, it is for victim groups from underserved communities that do not have the strategies or tactics they need to press for justice themselves. It is also written for **civil society organizations**, **community leaders**, and others (including international NGOs and international organizations) who work closely with them.

Other audiences may also find it useful, such as: victim communities from other situations for which transitional justice processes are or may be suitable; those in the international community who are responsible for designing or implementing justice processes and who wish to learn more about how they can support victim groups; university students and their clinical instructors and professors who want to

pursue a career in this field; and academics studying social movements and transitional justice, among other topics.

## What can readers expect to find in the Handbook?

The Handbook draws on lessons learned from past justice efforts to encourage readers to consider the strengths and limitations of different goals and tactics. Over 90 experts and practitioners also provided their input. It is divided into the following three sections:

### Part I: Understanding foundational concepts of pursuing justice for mass atrocities

- **Chapter 1** helps victim groups to **identify shared transitional justice goals** so that they can be precise and specific about what they mean when they say to decision-makers and other partners, “We want justice.”
- **Chapter 2** helps victim groups to consider **how different legal tools**—from criminal accountability, to state responsibility mechanisms, civil proceedings, and corruption, transnational crime, immigration fraud, and terrorism cases—**can achieve justice or increase pressure on decision-makers** to fund and implement the kinds of outcomes discussed in Chapter 1.

### Part II: Generating support for justice from key actors

- **Chapter 3** helps victim groups to decide whether and if so how, to join forces with other victim groups or organizations as a **victim-centered coalition for justice**.
- **Chapter 4** encourages victim groups and their civil society allies to consider **gathering and sharing relevant information**—other than victim and witness testimony and other forms of evidence—that may help decision-makers and officials to pursue justice.
- **Chapter 5** offers tips on what victim groups can do to press **political and diplomatic actors** to support their cause.
- **Chapter 6** offers tips on what victim groups can do to encourage **the general public** both inside and outside the affected country to support their cause.

### Part III: Confronting the practical challenges of pursuing justice for mass atrocities

- **Chapter 7** highlights some of the **personal and security risks** that victim groups may face when pursuing justice and steps that they can take to mitigate them.
- **Chapter 8** provides advice on how victim groups can **access the funds and support** they need to make their quest for justice sustainable over the long-term.

### Appendices: Additional resources

- **Appendix I** provides the **contact information of organizations and experts** that victim groups can contact to learn more about the topics discussed in the handbook.

- **Appendix II** provides a list of **other resources** that victim groups can use to advance justice and explains how these resources might be helpful.

The Handbook does not explain how to build a case or document crimes. Both of these activities usually require context-specific advice from experts, technical assistance, training, guidance, and mentoring. Dozens of experts in the areas discussed in the Handbook have agreed to have their contact information included so that readers can contact them.

## How can you use the Handbook?

The Handbook is a standalone resource. Reading, reflecting on, and talking about the Handbook is the best way to use it. Here are some points that readers may focus on to help them to identify their goals and how to pursue them:

- Goals and tactics that may be important or helpful to victim communities, those that may be unhelpful or less important, and others that the handbook does not cover
- Limitations and shortcomings of different goals or tactics and whether these drawback may be important to victim communities
- Tactics for pursuing justice that have worked or could work for them, tactics that have not or may not work in their context, and other tactics that the handbook does not cover
- Challenges they have encountered or expect to encounter, tips for overcoming them, and any other challenges that the handbook does not cover
- Similarities and differences between the examples raised and their situation, such as the level of outside support for and interest in transitional justice options
- Questions that the handbook leaves unanswered and that experts or organizations (listed in Appendix I) might be able to answer

For readers who want to take the handbook further, they may consider having a **meeting or workshop** to discuss their shared goals and strategies and identify next steps. The organizers may encourage participants to read relevant sections in advance; those leading the workshop may also read sections aloud at the workshop. The handbook’s table of contents, the list of relevant organizations and experts who victim groups can consult, and the points raised immediately above can be good places to start when planning.

You **do not need specialized training** to use, facilitate conversations about, or make decisions on topics in the Handbook. Given that victim groups come from diverse contexts, have unique goals, and approach decision-making in different ways, the Handbook **does not contain prescriptive exercises, present a particular “methodology,” or specify steps that victim groups need to follow**. Instead, the Handbook allows readers to make their own decisions about their goals, priority issues, and the most effective strategies.

## When was it published and will it go out of date?

The Handbook was published in and up-to-date as of March 2021. The institutions and processes discussed in the Handbook will evolve over time. This tends to happen slowly so we expect it to be useful

for many years to come. Moreover, many of the tactics and strategies discussed in the Handbook—particularly those not linked to specific institutions—will be valuable even if the context and institutions change.

## **How can readers access the handbook?**

The Handbook is available [online](#) and print copies are available to victim group representatives and those who work closely with them on request. The Handbook is available in English, Arabic, French, Ukrainian, and Russian. If you want more **information about how you can use the Handbook and how we can help**, please email Sarah McIntosh, the Handbook’s author, at [smcintosh@ushmm.org](mailto:smcintosh@ushmm.org).

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