

Combating Torture and other Ill-Treatment. A Manual for Action. London. 2016 By Amnesty International

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The new edition of Amnesty International's anti-torture manual appeared last year in a discreet way. So discreet that, being an international reference text, very few people seem to know about it. This is probably partly due to the contemporary trend to only publish texts and reports in an electronic format. In an environment of electronic saturation, documents can be ephemeral and the benefit of these kinds of general - purpose manuals are diluted. But, be sure, the Amnesty International handbook is a manual to have on the shelf, to consult and underline.

Structured in seven chapters, it reviews respectively the historical evolution of international legal mechanisms in the fight against torture (chapter one), international treaties and definitions (chapter 2), safeguards in detention conditions with special emphasis on vulnerable groups and conditions of detention (chapter 4), international obligations on prevention and the role of different professionals (chapter 5), legal elements of truth, justice and reparation for victims of torture (chapter 6) and guidelines for international campaigns for individual cases or countries (chapter 7).

The text deserves to be read in full for two reasons: (a) the review of the topics is exhaustive and all readers even the most trained in the subject will find elements they did not know; and, (b) the text sets out the position of Amnesty International on some controversial issues. For example, in the

international debate as to whether the distinction between torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (CIDT) should be based on the criterion of severity of suffering or the criterion of purpose of the alleged perpetrator. Amnesty sets out its position by proposing an even broader interpretation. CIDT should be all those conditions that meet the five criteria of the UN definition of torture except one, whatever it may be. However, Amnesty International opposes the idea that Prolonged Death Row should be considered CIDT (p 105) because there cannot be an "appropriate" length of time a prisoner can be held before execution. Arguing that situations of Prolonged Death Row amount to CIDT would in effect be arguing that executions should be carried out sooner.

The book is especially (if not only) oriented towards lawyers who will find in it an inexhaustible source of jurisprudence, soft-law and useful pointers. This strength is precisely its main weakness. The text lacks the most basic medical or psychosocial perspective and cites in a marginal way aspects related to the proper detection, support and rehabilitation of victims. It reduces the fight against torture to the field of the legal and thereby impoverishes it. In a text of this magnitude, with more than 300 dense pages, there is scarcely any mention of the Istanbul Protocol or the elements of forensic documentation, beyond some

references for jurists. This is more surprising when Amnesty International has always had strong medical and psychosocial components in their daily work that are not reflected here. Additionally, the richness of the text, an inexhaustible source of ideas, would be enhanced by a thematic index in the end that would help the reader to easily find references to specific aspects or sentences.

All in all, this is a very detailed text that is not meant to be pedagogical and simplify the comprehension of information, but rather to be exhaustive and comprehensive and must certainly be among the list of essential books of certainly any lawyer working with victims of torture.