



Global Government Hostage Affairs Recommendations

Resisting Illegal Government
Detentions & Hostage-Takings
Coalition



Coalition Chair



Global Government Hostage Affairs Recommendations

Around the world, hundreds of individuals are being held hostage by both state and non-state actors. While the precise number is difficult to verify, there is broad agreement that it has become increasingly common for governments to seize citizens of other countries in what has come to be known as “hostage diplomacy.” A comprehensive overview of those currently held as of March 2025 was compiled by Hostage Aid Worldwide.

As the rate of state-sponsored hostage-taking has accelerated, hostage affairs have become an increasingly important and visible space for government action. Over the past year, many new governments have come to power in democratic countries, including those whose citizens have been taken hostage by hostile regimes. These new governments, in particular, have an opportunity to either strengthen their existing hostage affairs portfolio or, in many cases, to formalize their hostage affairs management and resources. Even in cases of long-term governments, there is reason to take stock of hostage affairs efforts and identify places for improvement.

The RIGHT Coalition (Resisting Illegal Government detentions & Hostage-Taking) has compiled the following recommendations to help guide government action on hostage prevention and recovery, and support for those impacted by this harmful practice:

- 1. Create Centralized Hostage Response/Dedicated Lead Coordinator**
- 2. Establish Release Protocols**
- 3. Reentry and Recovery Protocols**
- 4. Institute Prevention and Deterrence Systems**
- 5. Develop Enforcement and Accountability Tools to Counter Hostage-Taking**

These recommendations highlight several opportunities for civil society to engage and support government efforts related to hostage prevention and recovery. In some instances, civil society engagement may be crucial, as these organizations do not necessarily have the same constraints as government entities. It should be emphasized that hostage prevention, recovery, and rehabilitation cannot fall on governments alone — nor only upon NGO groups. Coordination and collaboration is vital to success. In these cases, success is truly the difference between life and death.

The RIGHT Coalition is a network of individuals and civil society organizations that advocate on behalf of unjustly targeted individuals who are arbitrarily detained or taken hostage by foreign governments, their own governments, or non-state actors. We aim to secure their safe, immediate, and unconditional release, seek justice, redress, and rehabilitation for victims, provide support to their families and loved ones, deter future detentions, and pursue accountability for perpetrators.

The RIGHT Coalition stands ready to make connections and assist with any of the following actions and recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Create Centralized Hostage Response/Dedicated Advocate

We strongly recommend that any government that has seen a significant number of its citizens taken hostage have a central point of contact that coordinates a singular response across agencies.

Currently, this model only exists in the United States and Canada, but this streamlined office approach has proven effective in balancing the delicate work of negotiating for hostage return while reducing the impact of competing policy interests.

We recommend the following considerations when planning for a dedicated hostage response office or role:

- **Connection to Resources:** Designated offices or advocates must be connected with other resources to facilitate their work. Specifically, these offices should work closely with intelligence, crisis management, and consular teams.
- **Authority and Independence:** Hostage officials or offices must have appropriate authority to facilitate negotiations for release and should be equipped with appropriate expertise in negotiations. The office or official should also be independent from political offices or political influence. Independent authority to make case determinations will help ensure consistency.
- **Continuity of personnel:** To the extent possible, governments should prioritize continuity of staffing in this advocate's office, as negotiations are often long, complex, and require uniquely developed relationships that are not easily transferred.
- **Eligible cases:** Cases that fall under the authority of the office or official should be clearly and transparently defined. This definition should be broad enough to include cases of arbitrary detention and should ensure consistent treatment of cases. Government advocates should consider all citizens, regardless of whether they hold dual citizenship, as eligible for the services of this centralized advocate.
- **Determination process:** There should be an efficient, consistent, and transparent determination process for case eligibility and priority of government response. There should be clearly defined eligibility for other citizenship categories, including Permanent and Conditional Residents. There should be consistent application and a time frame for a determination.
- **Point of contact:** Within the government office, there should be a clear and centralized point of contact for victims, families, or other representatives to receive reliable and up-to-date information on their case.
- **Information sharing:** Designated offices or officials should create a protocol for information sharing with civil society to ensure that all parties have the necessary information to conduct effective advocacy for release.
- **Global response:** As more governments add this dedicated function, these specialized hostage advocates should form an international intergovernmental network to share best practices, facilitate negotiations, and present a united front on hostage recovery efforts. Multilateral institutions could participate in these efforts by appointing special hostage representatives — for instance, the UN could appoint a Special Rapporteur on Hostage Affairs.

We strongly recommend seeking policy and structural guidance from experienced organizations in the space or other state action on this topic. For example, the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation 2025 Hostage Report, the 2025 CSIS Combating State Hostage Taking and Wrongful Detention report, the Australian

Senate's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Report on the Wrongful detention of Australian citizens overseas, the UK's report, Stolen years: combatting state hostage diplomacy, and the Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations, initiated by Canada.

Recommendation 2

Establish Release Protocols

When a citizen is taken hostage, the dedicated hostage affairs office should follow a set of release protocols that will provide the most opportunities for a successful return.

Based on the collective experiences of RIGHT coalition members, we recommend the following:

- **Emphasize eradication of hostage-taking:** All efforts to release hostages should be informed by the broader goal of eradicating the practice of hostage-taking altogether. The immediate goal should be to secure the safe and immediate release of hostages, with the broader goal of deterring the practice altogether.
- **Defined roles:** Responsibilities for negotiation and ensuring the hostage's well-being should be divided. A clearly defined government entity, not based in the country of capture, should spearhead the release negotiations. Ideally, this would be the hostage affairs advocate outlined in Recommendation 1. However, if no such role or office exists, the government should find a suitable alternative. To the extent possible, in-country consular officers should focus on hostage well-being without involvement in the release negotiations. This will ensure that both key missions have uninterrupted focus.
- **Social services:** Identify social services that could be provided to the hostage and immediate family members of the captive to help them endure forced separation. Possible services may include mental or medical health support, funding for travel costs associated with advocacy, supplemental income, official documentation of their loved one's unlawful captivity to support interactions with creditors, and interventions to maintain hostages' credit cards, bank accounts, social media accounts.
- **Targeted and coordinated negotiation:** Identify negotiation levers with the captor country and implement an appropriate full-government response that coordinates efforts in using those levers, including but not limited to financial or travel-related sanctions, conditions on foreign aid receipt, and trade constraints.
- **Intermediaries and law enforcement:** Consider strategic use of third-party intermediaries when available and applicable. These could include other governments, private individuals, or other influential entities with connections that could be key to opening release negotiations. When necessary and appropriate, consider engaging law enforcement to recover hostages.
- **Trial monitoring:** Track ongoing developments in the trials or other proceedings related to hostage-taking. When possible, engage civil society to track developments and offer assessments of trials.
- **Public advocacy:** Engage with civil society or interested industry parties to coordinate public advocacy. Strategically engage with press and media to ensure that all related coverage serves to protect hostages and does not disseminate propaganda.

Recommendation 3

Establish Reentry and Recovery Protocols

After surviving a traumatic period of detention, the road to reentry can be difficult for former hostages and their families to navigate without the proper framework in place. Governments should develop a series of protocols to help that transition.

To the extent possible, returned hostages should be supported by their home country in the following ways:

- **Single point of contact:** All released hostages and their families should have a single reentry point of contact to coordinate support, clarify steps, and serve as a resource.
- **Immediate post-release support:** A Post Isolation Support Activity (PISA)-like program should evaluate the returned hostage's physical and psychological needs immediately upon return. Post-return support for physical and psychological trauma should be continued for a substantial period. The immediate family of the hostage should be included in the psychological support.
- **Standardize reentry support:** In the US, returnees have had vastly different experiences with the Post-Isolation Support Activity (PISA) program depending on their location. A comprehensive program for reentry care, including medical and psychological assessment and support, should be consistently applied for all returnees.
- **Long-term institutional support:** Governments should provide longer-term support, including financial support and resources to support workforce reentry, restoration of government-issued identification, mental and physical medical needs, family relations, restoration of access to credit, and media requests. This could include funds distributed from a government program, participation in government-sponsored programs, funds collected from seized assets of states sponsoring hostage taking, or a dedicated trust set up by private sponsors and administered by the state. Support should be provided for at least one year or half of the returnee's time in detention, whichever period is longer.
- **Returnee community:** If desired, returnees should have the opportunity to be introduced and integrated into the larger returned hostage community. This provides them with a network of individuals with shared experiences and allows them to become active in the hostage prevention space, if they choose to do so.
- **Communicate recovery protocols:** Clearly and immediately inform returnees and their families of the programs available to them, including third-party resources available through civil society organizations.
- **Engage civil society:** To help implement reentry and recovery support, governments should consider engaging civil society groups and faith-based organizations, similar to the US process for refugee resettlement, which engages designated nonprofits as voluntary agencies to help administer support programs.

Recommendation 4

Institute Education and Protection Systems

We strongly recommend that governments identify and implement pretravel deterrence strategies and policies.

Countries with targeted citizens are often best served by augmenting efforts to prevent and deter hostage-taking before travel. This can be achieved through direct government action or partnerships with highly impacted populations.

We recommend the implementation of the following:

- **Pretravel deterrence:** Potential pretravel deterrence strategies include but are not limited to public service announcements (PSAs), travel warnings or advisories, notifications, citizen travel bans, and/or waiver requirements.
- **Pretravel precautions:** Educational efforts should not only focus on deterring travel but also provide resources on who to contact if someone is detained and encourage or require travelers to sign a power of attorney and privacy act waiver, and take other measures to protect their livelihoods before traveling.
- **Focus on susceptible sectors:** Government training with industries often targeted for hostage-taking can better prepare travelers for potential danger. These industries could include those in the energy sector, religious organizations that perform missionary work, the media, aid/humanitarian organizations and other sectors that may travel to high-risk areas. Governments should engage civil society to identify additional groups. Trainings could be conducted in person or online and made available for dissemination. Some sectors should be required or encouraged to purchase hostage insurance for their employees.
- **Publicize statistics:** Governments should publish and publicize statistics on hostage taking of their citizens by country. These statistics should be made available to those traveling to countries of concern.
- **Educate likely travelers:** Dual citizens and permanent residents may be at particular risk of hostage-taking compared to a country's general population and consideration should be given to how best to engage those populations directly.
- **Engage journalists:** In addition to educating the media on travel risks, governments should engage journalists and other media members to help inform the public and share information on high-risk areas.
- **Engage airlines:** To the extent possible, governments should require airlines to inform travelers of the risk of travel when they purchase tickets, possibly requiring travelers to sign an acknowledgement or consent form. Airlines may also be engaged to track the number of travelers to high-risk areas. This would likely require legislation.

Recommendation 5

Develop Enforcement and Accountability Tools to Counter Hostage-Taking

When taking hostages, hostile governments or non-state actors have to weigh the risks of such an endeavor against the anticipated benefits. One way to strengthen deterrence, particularly concerning state actors, is to create robust enforcement and accountability mechanisms. Such tools can respond to hostage-taking entities in real time, while also serving as a warning to would-be hostage takers.

Examples of such mechanisms could include:

- **Justice for victims:** Enable pathways for justice for those wrongly detained, including permitting private suits against state and non-state actors that would allow for seizure of sovereign assets.
- **National court judgments:** Enforcement of national court judgements against state sponsors of hostage taking.
- **Action against perpetrators:** Direct action against individual perpetrators of hostage-taking, including arrest, trial, imposition of Magnitsky-style sanctions (e.g., visa bans, asset freezes, exclusions from global financial systems), reductions or elimination of foreign aid, restrictions on trade, exclusions from international bodies, and direct recovery from perpetrators in domestic courts, including through legislation creating exceptions to foreign sovereign immunity.
- **Engage media and legal partners:** Develop legal and media networks to spearhead and publicize campaigns seeking justice.
- **Strengthen global response:** Governments should engage multilateral partners, possibly through intergovernmental organizations like the UN with the goal of criminalizing hostage-taking broadly while avoiding harming citizens through punitive sanctions or other measures.
- **Seize assets to compensate victims:** Governments should legislate pathways to seize hostage-takers' assets to compensate victims and their families. One example of this in the US is the American Victims of Terror Compensation Act.
- **Designate state sponsors of arbitrary/wrongful detention:** Governments should legislate a designation for state sponsors of arbitrary detention that allows for targeted action against those states, including sanctions, withholding foreign aid, and travel bans.
- **Adopt international opinions on cases:** Where international bodies, like the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, have issued opinions on cases of hostage-taking, governments should adopt those opinions.

Index 1: RIGHT Coalition Members Capabilities and Contacts

Name / Organization	Diplomacy	Family / Re-entry Support	Communication	Advocacy	Research & Academic Publishing	Survivor Perspective
Chloe Cheung / The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation	○	○	○	●	○	○
Anaïse Kanimba	○	●	●	○	○	●
Paul Rusesabagina and Carine Kanimba	○	●	○	●	○	●
Andrea Prasow / Freedom Now	●	○	●	●	●	○
Amnesty International USA	○	○	●	●	●	○
Benjamin Gray / James W. Foley Legacy Foundation*	○	○	●	●	●	○
Berit Lindeman / Norwegian Helsinki Committee	○	●	●	●	○	○
Beth Cooper / Former SPEHA	●	○	○	●	○	○
Brandon Silver / Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights	●	●	●	●	●	○
Lantos Foundation for Human Rights & Justice	○	○	●	●	○	○
Nizar Zakka / Hostage Aid Worldwide	●	●	●	●	●	●

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Felix Maradiaga / Nicaragua Freedom Foundation	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒
Jared Genser / Perseus Strategies	☒	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐
Jon Alterman / CSIS	☐	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐
Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐
Jorge Toledo*	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒
Kylie Moore-Gilbert / AWADA	☐	☒	☐	☒	☒	☒
Mickey Bergman / Global Reach*	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Richard Ratcliffe*	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
Pedro Pizano	☐	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐
Campaign for Uyghurs	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☒

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Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐
Siamak Namazi	☒	☐	☒	☒	☐	☒
Sigrid Lipott, UN Advisor	☒	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐
Tatyana Eatwell / Doughty Street Chambers	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
Haydee Dijkstal / 33 Bedford Row Chambers	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
Grace Chen	☒	☐	☐	☒	☒	☒
Mohammad Al Abdallah / Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC)*	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
Jonathan Landreth	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
Lara Symons / Hostage International	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒
Mouna Ferdi*	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐

Additional notes on services provided by Coalition participants

Name / Organization	Notes
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights	Our advocacy with families also includes referrals and connections to direct support based on need but we don't deliver those services directly.
Siamak Namazi	Corporate perspective / former hostage campaigning
Sigrid Lipott, UN Advisor	Operationally securing the release
Tatyana Eatwell / Doughty Street Chambers	Former Hostage / Campaigning
Haydee Dijkstal / 33 Bedford Row Chambers	Campaigning
Grace Chen	Investigations and accountability efforts
Mohammad Al Abdallah / Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC)*	Advocacy from the perspective of experience of running a global advocacy and public campaign (collaborating with NGOs, media, private and public sector, etc.) and collaborating, supporting and sharing best practices with other families.

For more information about these recommendations or the RIGHT Coalition, contact Candace Bryan Abbey (candace@hrf.org) or Kaitie Holland (kaitie@hrf.org)