



III. SELECTING AND SUPPORTING TESTIFIERS

A tribunal/hearing can include first-person, advocate, or joint testimonies. Any testimony can include accounts of violations against an individual or against a wider class or group. A “first-person testimony” is usually one that is delivered by the person who experienced the violation(s) recounted. However, it is also possible for an appropriate person to introduce and then dramatically represent such an account as a first-person narrative. An “advocate testimony” is one that is presented on behalf of one or more individuals who have directly experienced certain types of violation(s). A “joint testimony” has more than one individual presenting the testimony and can comprise a mix of advocate and/or first-person accounts.

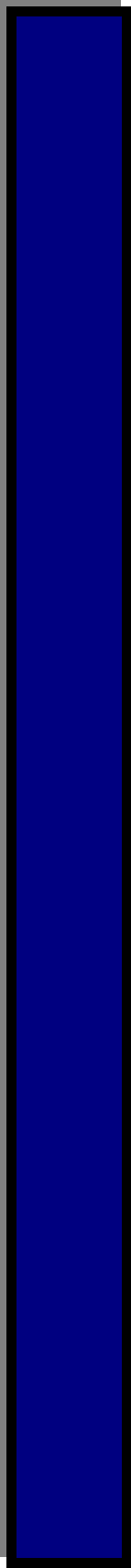
Participating in a popular tribunal/hearing involves a significant degree of stress. By definition, human rights tribunals/hearings addresses issues and recounts events that are likely to be upsetting for all tribunal/hearing participants. This includes members of the audience, who are present to bear witness to grave injustices, and in some cases, horrendous atrocities.

Given the stressful nature of the tribunal/hearing process, it is imperative that all potential testifiers fully understand the political nature of the tribunal/hearing and their role in speaking out as politically conscious survivors, or as advocates on behalf of survivors. It is especially important to be sensitive to the well being of potential testifiers and to ensure that the tribunal/hearing process does not exacerbate any trauma that they may have experienced previously. In the case of first-person accounts of direct violations presented by the victims, a number of years should have lapsed between the time of the abuse and the tribunal/hearing.

Prior to the selection of testifiers, it is advisable to establish clear and rigorous criteria for the selection process. Together with the guidelines in Shaping Testimonies (Section IV), these criteria will help to safeguard against sensationalism and ensure that the emphasis is on documenting abuses for the purposes of demanding accountability rather than on the details of the abuse *per se*.

GENERAL GUIDELINES ON SELECTING TESTIFIERS

An effective tribunal/hearing will feature strong and compelling testimonies delivered by articulate and assertive speakers. While public speaking skills and



styles differ from person to person, generally, the selected speakers should speak as clearly as possible, and be easily understood in the language in which they testify. This is particularly relevant when the venue selected is large and/or where simultaneous translation will be provided. **It is very important to keep in mind that testifiers with certain disabilities may require assistance and support to ensure the effective delivery of their presentations.** For example, such supports could include:

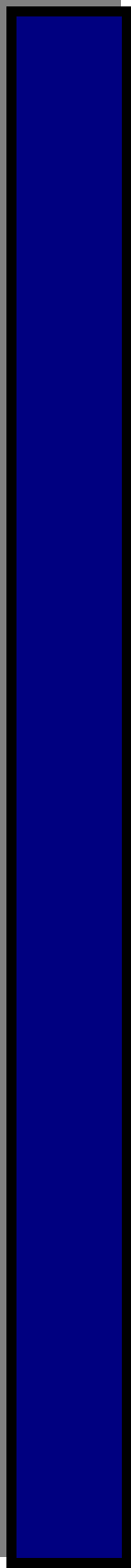
- A co-presenter
- A longer time slot
- Sign interpretation
- Simultaneous display of the text of the testimony
- Pre-recorded video testimony

Thorough preparation and rehearsal will improve the delivery of any testimony. However, even a strong testimony may fail to do justice to the case if a testifier with very limited communications skills is expected to deliver a testimony without adequate supports. With the foregoing caveats in mind, some of the attributes to look for in testifiers include:

- Individuals who are good public speakers/presenters and who will be able to deliver their testimony – either alone or with support -- clearly and effectively.
- Speakers who are not vulnerable at the time of the tribunal/hearing. Do not include testifiers who are currently experiencing abuse or who may be in further danger if they participate in the tribunal/hearing. If there is an urgent situation, which the tribunal/hearing committee and a potential testifier feel must be addressed, it's advisable that the true identity of the victim be concealed and the case presented by a third party, or as an advocate testimony.
- Testifiers who are politicized and/or activists. That is, invite speakers who are conscious of the wider context and set of issues reflected in their own experience and who readily think in terms of demanding accountability from policymakers, governments, agencies and the UN. Such speakers can be particularly effective in articulating the violations they experienced as well as suggesting remedies.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

The tribunal/hearing coordinator, working closely with members of the tribu-



nal/hearing committee and Advisory Group, manages the selection of speakers. To begin this process, the tribunal/hearing coordinator, with assistance from the committee, should draft a concise ‘briefing document’ that can be circulated to those involved in the selection process. This document might include:

- A concise list of the tribunal/hearing objectives in order of priority.
- A list of key issues to be addressed by the tribunal/hearing.
- A statement of general guidelines on selecting potential testifiers.
- A set of agreed diversity criteria to assist in ensuring the inclusion of testifiers across a range of significant categories. For example, the tribunal/hearing committee may decide that it is important to have a cross-section of testimonies in order to reflect diversity with respect to region, race, religious or ethnic background, social status, sexual orientation.

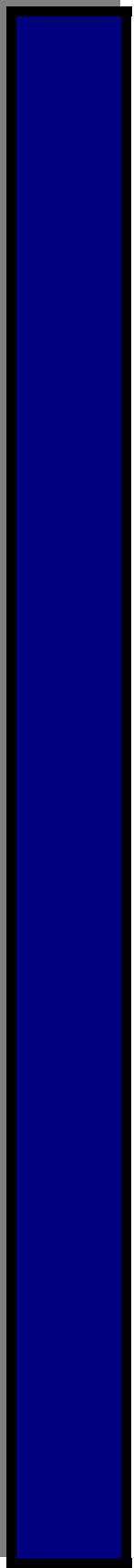
Once the ‘briefing document’ has been completed, it should be circulated to members of the tribunal/hearing committee and Advisory Group to begin to identify and compile information on existing cases with which they are familiar and which reflect the established guidelines. At this point, it is also appropriate to contact any other collaborating organizations that would be helpful in identifying possible cases.

The information collected on possible cases should not only relate to the agreed tribunal/hearing objectives but should also provide basic answers to the questions listed in Section IV, Shaping the Testimonies. Gathering this information early on and systematically will help in making informed decisions during the final round of selection.

It’s useful to give each member of the tribunal/hearing committee the responsibility of locating a particular number of testimonies and testifiers in a specific category. The specific category can be either thematic or regional. For example, a committee member may be responsible for identifying three cases on the issue of “women in war and conflict situations” or “women and AIDS.” Alternatively, a committee member may be charged with sourcing the European or Asian cases across a number of issues.

ENSURING PROPER SUPPORT FOR TESTIFIERS

Once the testifiers have been invited and have agreed to participate, it’s important to ensure that there are support persons in place who can provide them with both technical and moral support, as needed. Potential testifiers will need technical assistance and guidance in drafting and refining their testimonies.



They will also need moral and emotional support in managing the general stress associated with making public presentations about experiences and issues that are disturbing to recount (especially where the media are present).

- **Technical support:** Assign a member of the tribunal/hearing committee to work closely with each testifier to help prepare and revise the testimony in accordance with the overall tribunal/hearing objectives as well as with the time and format constraints you have set in Sections II and IV respectively.
- **Moral support:** Assign a person to support the testifier prior to, during and after they deliver their testimony. Because testifying can be emotionally taxing, it is important to recruit individuals willing and able to support the speakers on this level as required.

For these roles it is most beneficial to choose persons who are familiar with the subject matter of the testimony and have had some experience in shaping public presentations. In some instances, both the technical and moral support roles may be filled by one person. In other instances, it may be helpful to bring an additional person along for the day of the tribunal/hearing. (Be sure to keep this expense in mind as you plan and budget for the event.)