



Joint Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture for her upcoming report on Global Trends and Developments on Torture

May 2025

The #UnitedAgainstTorture Consortium (UATC) brings together the Association for the Prevention of Torture ([APT](#)), the International Federation of ACATs ([FIACAT](#)), the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims ([IRCT](#)), [Omega](#) Research Foundation, [REDRESS](#), and the World Organisation Against Torture ([OMCT](#)).

The members of the #UnitedAgainstTorture Consortium and the civil society networks represented welcome the opportunity to provide this joint submission on Global Trends and Developments on Torture to inform the UN Special Rapporteur's upcoming report to the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly in October 2025.

Despite four decades of significant achievements, serious challenges to the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment persist. In this context, the UATC draws attention to three priority areas.

Torture and ill-treatment in the context of protest

The use of law enforcement tactics to suppress protests, silence dissent, and intimidate human rights defenders has become widespread. 2024 was characterised by a high number of elections occurring against a backdrop of shrinking civic space and rising authoritarianism. In many countries, election-related protests were met with violent crackdowns.

Allegations of torture and other ill-treatment have frequently arisen in the context of protest repression, particularly in relation to excessive use of force by law enforcement. Repressive policing practices, including the use of law enforcement weapons and equipment, have often been associated with deaths and with severe, sometimes long-lasting, physical and psychological harm.

Police forces around the globe have demonstrated a worrisome trend towards militarisation. In this context, monitoring protests is crucial to detect and deter torture and ill-treatment. Yet, monitors themselves are being increasingly targeted or restricted. At the same time, impunity for violations committed in the context of protests often persists, due to the absence of independent investigative and prosecutorial bodies, challenges in identifying perpetrators, and the risk of reprisals faced by witnesses and victims struggling to obtain reparation.

In 2024, harsh crackdowns on protests were documented around the world, amid reports of police violence and allegations of torture and ill-treatment. UN experts, including the High Commissioner for Human Rights, have condemned the violent repression of protests in [Bangladesh](#), [Venezuela](#), [Kenya](#), [Georgia](#), [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), [Mozambique](#), [Tanzania](#), [United States](#), France (specifically the Non-Self-Governing Territory of [New Caledonia](#)), and [Nigeria](#).

During the reporting period, the UATC closely monitored the situations in Bangladesh, Kenya, Georgia and Turkey:



Bangladesh

In mid-July 2024, student-led protests erupted in response to the reinstatement of quotas for government jobs for holders of freedom fighters' certificates and their families. The protests were violently repressed by law enforcement, including the Rapid Action Battalion, and armed supporters of the Awami League. According to [OHCHR](#), up to 1,400 people may have been killed during the protests and more than 11,700 were arrested and detained.

Kenya

On 18 June 2024, protests broke out in response to proposed tax increases amid a cost-of-living crisis. These demonstrations were met with severe and unlawful repression by State security forces. According to [IMLU](#), the protests led to 63 extrajudicial killings, 89 enforced disappearances, and over 2,000 injuries.

Georgia

On 28 November 2024, the political party "Georgian Dream" publicly announced the suspension of EU accession talks, which ignited mass protests across Georgian cities. The protests were met with police violence, including the use of less-lethal weapons in violation of their deployment rules as well as very violent physical attacks on protesters and journalists, both at protest sites and during transportation to detention facilities. Victims have since reported no progress on their complaints. Impunity has been further facilitated by the fact that many victims were unable to identify their assailants due to a lack of identifying insignia or number on the officers' uniforms.

Turkey

Mass protests erupted across Turkey on 19 March 2025, following the detention of more than 100 individuals, including the Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu. Although protests were overwhelmingly peaceful, journalists and civil society organisations have documented widespread and disproportionate police violence. Reports include beatings with batons, kicking of subdued demonstrators, close-range use of kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs), and indiscriminate deployment of chemical irritants and water cannons. Human rights defenders and journalists covering the protests were also targeted by the authorities.

Positive international developments

Following the publication of the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, the UATC was pleased to see that the HRC resolution [56/10](#) on peaceful protests includes reference to this new tool and reaffirms the absolute prohibition of torture, including in situations where assembly is no longer peaceful.

The UATC encourages the Special Rapporteur on Torture to call on States to adopt and implement the recommendations outlined in the Model Protocol, in order to prevent and address allegations of torture and ill-treatment during public assemblies.



Torture-Free Trade

The UATC is committed to working for an international legally binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty to address the trade in law enforcement weapons and equipment used for torture and other ill-treatment.

The Consortium commends the Special Rapporteur on Torture for her support for the campaign for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty and acknowledges her engagement with civil society and the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade. The UATC calls on more States to join the Alliance and encourages civil society to support this issue.

Torture-Free Trade Network & Movement-Building

The campaign for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty is a shared priority for the Consortium. All UATC organisations are members of the Torture-Free Trade Network – which brings together over 85 civil society organisations from all regions – and are signatories to the [Shoreditch Declaration for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty](#).

Under the UATC, Omega Research Foundation has provided small grants to seven organisations (based in Argentina, Colombia, Egypt, South Africa, and Uganda), supporting work to strengthen and sustain research, advocacy, and campaigning for torture-free trade.

These projects have included research into the law enforcement weapons and equipment used in national contexts, high-level regional advocacy, awareness-raising campaigns, strategic engagement with National Preventive Mechanisms, and building advocacy networks. The UATC is committed to working collectively to further strengthen the global anti-torture movement, including through the Torture-Free Trade Network’s campaign.

EU Anti-Torture Regulation

The UATC notes the recent European Commission [proposals](#) to substantially broaden the scope of goods covered by the EU Anti-Torture Regulation (“the Regulation”), which is legally binding on all EU Member States. The UATC supports the European Commission’s proposals to significantly expand the range of goods encompassed in Annex II (a list of inherently abusive goods that can only be used for torture and the death penalty) and Annex III (a range of law enforcement equipment that can be used for torture). These changes appear to have been informed by recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on Torture in her 2023 [Study](#) on the global trade in law enforcement equipment used in torture and other ill-treatment. The proposed changes also reflect that torture and ill-treatment may occur both during deprivation of liberty and in extra-custodial settings, including at protests. We welcome the expansion of scope of the Regulation, accounting for developments in technology, marketing, and use and misuse of law enforcement equipment

There remain areas where we believe specific goods (for example, multiple KIPs and multi-barrel launchers capable of firing KIPs) should be prohibited. Nonetheless, the proposed changes – if approved by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU – will significantly strengthen the Regulation. We encourage the Special Rapporteur to join us in supporting the Commission’s



proposed revisions, calling on the Parliament and Council to endorse them and all EU Member States to implement them fully.

The UATC welcomes the forthcoming formal comprehensive review of the implementation of the Regulation, due to be completed in December 2025, which provides a further opportunity for the EU and Member States to strengthen the Regulation and its implementation.

Trade Fairs

Under the UATC umbrella, Omega Research Foundation conducts in-depth research into arms and security trade fairs, including the companies attending and the products being promoted. In addition to widespread promotion of weapons and equipment included by the Special Rapporteur on Torture in her list of equipment that should face robust trade controls, equipment considered by the Special Rapporteur to be inherently abusive is regularly promoted at certain arms and security trade fairs around the world.

There is a need for awareness-raising and guidance around inherently abusive equipment that should never be promoted at such events. This guidance would assist fair organising companies and customs authorities to ensure that companies exhibiting do not promote goods that are considered by the Special Rapporteur as violating the UN Convention Against Torture. We encourage the Special Rapporteur to continue to work with civil society and other stakeholders to develop such guidance.

Survivor engagement

Thematic briefing with Mr. Haoussou for UN Convention Against Torture's 40th anniversary

In November 2024, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Convention against Torture, the UN Committee Against Torture held a thematic briefing with UATC during which Mr. Kolbassia Haoussou, a Cameroonian survivor and head of the UK's only torture survivor-led activist network, Survivors Speak OUT (SSO), addressed the Committee. His intervention demonstrated how survivor voices add depth and human dimension to the Committee's work. The Committee has shown openness to survivor engagement, and this initiative was positively received. Survivor participation with the Committee can take many forms, including engagement from individuals whose States have recently undergone review or are scheduled for review. Future efforts may include identifying participants and ensuring their involvement is safe, ethical, and meaningful. Reflections are currently underway on how to strengthen survivor engagement with UN and regional mechanisms, with the aim of offering practical insights and enhancing the impact of international accountability processes.