



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Katherine Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 4, 2024

On June 26, we marked the 37th anniversary of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. By ratifying this landmark agreement, all OSCE participating States committed to take effective measures to prevent any act of torture and to hold to account those who employ this heinous practice. Unfortunately, authorities in a number of OSCE participating States still use torture and other inhumane treatment as tools of repression against detainees, human rights defenders, pro-democracy activists, members of disfavored ethnic and religious groups, and those who voice opinions with which these governments disagree.

Russia's forces in Ukraine have used torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment against Ukrainian civilians, detainees, and prisoners of war, particularly in occupied areas. A March 2024 report by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine found that Russian service members or officials routinely tortured Ukrainian prisoners of war, using repeated beatings, electric shocks, and mock execution. The April 2024 Moscow Mechanism report documented widespread and systematic use of torture by Russian authorities against the many thousands of detained Ukrainian civilians. On June 25, the European Court of Human Rights found Russia in violation of its obligations regarding torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as it had used these practices against Ukrainian military personnel, pro-Ukrainian and Tatar activists, and journalists in Crimea.

Within Russia itself, torture is conducted with near impunity. Despite the findings of the 2018 Moscow Mechanism report, Russian authorities failed to investigate allegations of mass torture and extrajudicial killings of LGBTQI+ persons in Chechnya. This year, as we know, Aleksey Navalny died in Russian custody. His extended periods in solitary confinement in harsh conditions could amount to torture.

In Belarus, there has been no accountability for thousands of credible reports of torture – and in some cases, death – of peaceful protesters and other ordinary Belarusians at the hands of authorities following the rigged elections in August 2020. Human rights organizations report that many of the approximately 1,400 unjustly held political prisoners in Belarus continue to face torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or

punishment, including repeated beatings, denial of medical care, and incommunicado detention.

Human rights organizations say torture is an ongoing problem in other participating States. In Central Asia, perpetrators rarely face accountability. There were also credible reports of torture in places of detention in Azerbaijan and Türkiye; some of these reports have implicated police and other law enforcement agencies. Using torture and other ill-treatment against individuals held unjustly in detention for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms is especially concerning. We urge these governments to thoroughly investigate these allegations and hold those responsible to account.

We welcome the legal steps that some governments have taken to address torture. Turkmenistan amended its law in 2022 to strengthen the prohibition on torture, and Kazakhstan amended its law in 2023 to make the penalties for torture slightly stricter. We urge them to implement these measures effectively and consistently.

The United States is committed to ending the practice of torture worldwide and to supporting survivors, including through the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. So long as any person anywhere suffers from torture, we will not waver in our commitment to eliminating it.

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