

GLOBAL TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS ON TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

SUBMISSION TO THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON
TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT
OR PUNISHMENT



AMNESTY
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Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the call for input¹ by the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Special Rapporteur on Torture) on global trends and developments relating to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. This submission responds specifically to Section E of the call and provides a high-level thematic analysis of trends in the policing of assemblies, with particular reference to the use of certain less lethal weapons. While this submission does not provide an exhaustive country-by-country analysis, it highlights key global patterns and concerns in the policing of assemblies and the use of law enforcement equipment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the call for input¹ by the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Special Rapporteur on Torture) on global trends and developments relating to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. This submission responds specifically to Section E of the call and provides a high-level thematic analysis of trends in the policing of assemblies, with particular reference to the use of certain less lethal weapons. It summarizes concerns drawn principally from material published by Amnesty International from 1 July 2024 to date. While this submission does not provide an exhaustive country-by-country analysis, it highlights key global patterns and concerns in the policing of assemblies and the use of law enforcement equipment. The submission draws attention to the use of equipment listed by the Special Rapporteur as Category A (prohibited equipment) and Category B (equipment that should be strictly regulated) in the context of assemblies.

2. TRENDS IN THE POLICING OF ASSEMBLIES

Protest-related human rights violations continued. While some states took measures to facilitate and protect peaceful assemblies in line with their human rights obligations under international law, many others responded with violent crackdowns. Protesters have been met with unnecessary and excessive use of force, mass arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention, enforced disappearances, and unlawful killings.

In Mozambique, for instance, following contested general elections in October 2024, security forces responded to mass protests with unlawful force, including lethal force. Amnesty International documented over 300 deaths and serious injuries to more than 3,000 individuals, including protesters, journalists and bystanders. Reports indicated widespread and unlawful use of live ammunition, kinetic impact projectiles, and chemical irritants such as tear gas against demonstrators.²

In Bangladesh, protesters demanding reforms in the quota-system which reserved 30% of government jobs for descendants of independence war veterans were violently suppressed, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries. Authorities deployed water cannon and used tear gas excessively and recklessly, creating severe health risks. Lethal force was also unlawfully used against protesters.³ Similar concerns were reported in Nigeria, where protests related to economic hardships and governance issues were met with disproportionate force⁴ and in Kenya where unlawful force was used against protesters during protests against a proposed finance law.⁵

In July 2024, Amnesty International published a major survey of the state of the right to protest in 21 European countries. This included documentation of extensive misuse of less lethal weapons, including water cannon, tear gas, pepper spray, kinetic impact projectiles and batons.⁶

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2025/call-inputs-global-trends-and-developments-torture>

² Amnesty International, *Mozambique: Protest Under Attack: Human Rights Violations During Mozambique's Post-2024 Election Crackdown*, (Index: AFR 41/9225/2025), April 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr41/9225/2025/en/

³ Amnesty International, Bangladesh: *Witness testimony, video and photographic analysis confirm police used unlawful force against protesters*, July 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/bangladesh-witness-testimony-video-and-photographic-analysis-confirm-police-used-unlawful-force-against-protesters/; Bangladesh: *Further video and photographic analysis confirm police unlawfully used lethal and less-lethal weapons against protesters*, 25 July 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/bangladesh-further-video-and-photographic-analysis-confirm-police-unlawfully-used-lethal-and-less-lethal-weapons-against-protesters/

⁴ Amnesty International, Nigeria: *Bloody August: Nigerian Government's Violent Crackdown On #Endbadgovernance Protests* (Index: AFR 44/8780/2024), November 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/8780/2024/en/

⁵ Amnesty International, Kenya: *End Police Use of Unlawful Force, Time for Accountability and Justice*, September 2024, www.amnestykenya.org/kenya-25-june-2024-end-police-use-of-unlawful-force-time-for-accountability-and-justice/

⁶ Amnesty International, *Europe: Under Protected and Over Restricted: The state of the right to protest in 21 European countries*, Index: EUR 01/8199/2024, 8 July 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/8199/2024/en/ pp. 113-17.

These examples underscore a pattern of the authorities' increasingly treating assemblies as security threats rather than legitimate expressions of dissent. Moreover, there is a persistent lack of accountability for violations committed in the context of protests, further entrenching a culture of impunity.

These violations are facilitated by the ongoing availability and circulation of law enforcement equipment that is either inherently abusive or that can be used for legitimate purposes but is prone to misuse. The global trade in such equipment remains inadequately regulated. Without an international legally binding instrument to regulate the production, trade, and transfer of tools of torture, in most regions manufacturers and suppliers are able to market and sell equipment to security forces with little to no oversight. The lack of transparency surrounding end-user agreements, export licenses, and accountability mechanisms increases the risks that equipment will be used for torture and other ill-treatment during law enforcement operations, especially in the context of assemblies.

3. MISUSE OF CATEGORY B EQUIPMENT

In her 2023 report, the Special Rapporteur on Torture provided a non-exhaustive list of law enforcement equipment which, though not inherently abusive, pose significant risks of torture or other ill-treatment when used improperly.⁷ Amnesty International has documented instances where such equipment has been unlawfully used in the context of protests, leading to violations of the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, as well as the right to life.

In Mozambique, visual evidence verified by Amnesty International showed police firing tear gas canisters recklessly, from a moving vehicle and directly at protesters who did not pose any risk to anyone during the 2024 protests.⁸ In some cases, tear gas grenades were fired into people's homes thereby posing a severe risk of adverse health effects, including suffocation.⁹ In other cases, protesters sustained serious injuries as a result of being struck by tear gas grenades.¹⁰ Similarly, in Kenya police repeatedly fired tear gas grenades directly at protesters, sometimes at head height, or straight up in the air, risking severely injuring people when they landed. A protester lost three fingers after being hit by a tear gas grenade.¹¹ In Angola, Amnesty International documented cases of the use of batons against peaceful protesters who were not engaged in - or even threatening - violent behaviour.¹²

Amnesty International's July 2024 report on the policing of protests in Europe presented multiple examples of the misuse of less lethal weapons, often resulting in serious injuries. This included analysis of footage and testimony of the aggressive use of batons in France, Germany and Portugal; the excessive and reckless use of tear gas and water cannon in Slovenia; the firing of tear gas grenades directly at protests and beatings with batons in Serbia; the loss of an eye after the misuse of kinetic impact projectiles in Spain; and the use of electric shock devices against peaceful protesters in Hungary.¹³

There have been no significant positive developments over the last one year in relation to the use of less lethal weapons in the context of protests. Security forces that routinely suppress protests still do so using both lethal and less lethal law enforcement equipment available to them. The absence of a legally binding instrument regulating the trade in this equipment means that states and companies continue to supply less lethal equipment to security forces who routinely use it to commit torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

⁷ UN OHCHR, Thematic study on the global trade in weapons, equipment and devices used by law enforcement and other public authorities that are capable of inflicting torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, A/78/324, [ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78324-thematic-study-global-trade-weapons-equipment-and-devices-used](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78324-thematic-study-global-trade-weapons-equipment-and-devices-used)

⁸ Protest Under Attack: Human Rights Violations During Mozambique's Post-2024 Election Crackdown (previously cited), p 26.

⁹ Protest Under Attack: Human Rights Violations During Mozambique's Post-2024 Election Crackdown (previously cited), p 15

¹⁰ Protest Under Attack: Human Rights Violations During Mozambique's Post-2024 Election Crackdown (previously cited), p 26

¹¹ Kenya: End police use of unlawful force (previously cited).

¹² Amnesty International, 'Angola: Broken Promises: Protesters Caught Between Tear Gas, Bullets, And Batons in Angola' (Index: AFR 12/8764/2024) November 2024, p 25, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr12/8756/2024/en/

¹³ Amnesty International, *Europe: Under Protected and Over Restricted: The state of the right to protest in 21 European countries*, Index: EUR 01/8199/2024, 8 July 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/8199/2024/en/ pp. 115-17.

4. THE INTRODUCTION OF TASER IN CHILE

In Chile, the government announced a pilot project due to begin in March 2025 for the introduction of the use of TASER for law enforcement without any consultation with civil society and relevant experts. Information available about the project from the Chilean authorities has been minimal and conflicting.¹⁴ At the time of writing it remains unclear which model will be deployed, what the threshold and circumstances of use will be and whether, depending on the model adopted, use in direct contact (drive stun) mode will be permitted. There is an urgent need for more information and wider consultation before the adoption of TASER, including assessment of the operational needs, threshold of use and the mitigation of the clear human rights risks involved in the deployment of projectile electric shock weapons identified by Amnesty International and other organizations.¹⁵

5. USE OF PROHIBITED EQUIPMENT (CATEGORY A GOODS)

Category A goods include law enforcement equipment that is inherently abusive and should be prohibited altogether. These include direct contact electric shock weapons, spiked batons, weighted leg restraints, thumb cuffs, among other types of equipment. Despite growing international recognition of the need to prohibit such items, they continue to be produced, traded, and used in both custodial and extra-custodial contexts.

In March 2025 Amnesty International published a report on the global use of electric shock devices, documenting the use of direct contact electric shock weapons such as stun guns and stun batons in all regions during the policing of protest and against those arrested in the context of protests, as well as on other detainees.¹⁶ The report illustrated examples of such use in Russia, Iran, USA, Belarus, among other countries.¹⁷ In September 2024, a UK company promoted the sale of a direct contact electric shock glove at a Birmingham trade fair.¹⁸

In November 2024, the French authorities released the annual report of L'Inspection Générale de la Police Nationale (IGPN) covering activities in 2023.¹⁹ According to the report, 48% of TASER deployment in 2023 was as a de facto direct contact electric shock weapon in “drive stun” mode.²⁰ Use of projectile shock weapons in drive stun mode violates international human rights law and standards and may amount to torture or other ill-treatment.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The unlawful use of less lethal weapons in the context of protests and in detention, sometimes resulting in torture or other ill-treatment remains a grave concern in many countries. The need for the adoption of a treaty at the international level to regulate the trade in the “tools of torture” is critical in the efforts to prevent torture and other ill-treatment in both custodial and extra-custodial contexts. States must ensure that they have comprehensive domestic legal frameworks on the use of force. Amnesty International welcomes the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture’s support for international regulations on the trade of tools of torture and looks forward to working with her mandate towards the adoption of a Torture-Free Trade Treaty.

¹⁴ Letter from Amnistía Internacional Chile to Presidente de la República de Chile, 31 March 2025, on file.

¹⁵ Amnesty International, “*I Still Can’t Sleep at Night*” *The Global Abuse of Electric Shock Equipment*” (Index: POL 30/8990/2025) March 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/8990/2025/en/, p. 60.

¹⁶ Amnesty International, “*I Still Can’t Sleep at Night*” (previously cited).

¹⁷ The Global Abuse of Electric Shock Equipment (previously cited), pp 25-29.

¹⁸ Amnesty International UK, “Company run by retired police officers promoting electric-shock torture equipment”, 19 September 2024, www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-company-run-retired-police-officers-promoting-electric-shock-torture-equipment

¹⁹ Ministère de l’Intérieur, Rapport d’activité de l’Inspection générale de la Police nationale pour l’année 2023, 19 November 2024, <https://mobile.interieur.gouv.fr/Publications/Rapports-de-l-IGPN/Rapport-annuel-d-activite-de-l-IGPN-2023>

²⁰ Rapport d’activité de l’Inspection générale, (previously cited), p. 122.

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