



United States Mission to the OSCE

National Statement on International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

As delivered by Political Counselor Elisabeth Rosenstock-Siller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 6, 2023

My delegation was pleased to join the statement delivered by my Swiss colleague regarding International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. As Secretary Blinken said in observance: “the United States reaffirms our condemnation of torture wherever and whenever it occurs and stands in solidarity with victims and survivors of torture around the world.”

Nearly three years since the 2020 Tirana Ministerial Council Decision, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment continue to be practiced with impunity by authorities in the OSCE region. Regrettably, some participating States have not made even the slightest effort to eradicate torture. Even worse, the governments of some participating States have increased their use of torture.

Russia has extensively used torture in its war of aggression against Ukraine. The April and July 2022 Moscow Mechanism Expert Reports concluded that Russia’s forces and proxies have subjected both combatants and civilians to torture and other ill treatment. The March 2023 UN Commission of Inquiry report also found a “systematic and widespread” use of torture to extract confessions, coerce cooperation, or inflict punishments on detainees.

Survivors of Russia’s extensive filtration and detention systems tell of beatings and assaults and of countless others having been killed or disappeared. We have heard chilling accounts of electrocution, sexual violence, and suffocation just for speaking the Ukrainian language or for forgetting the words to Russia’s national anthem. More than 90 percent of former detainees interviewed said they endured torture, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. At Tirana, the OSCE Ministerial Council called on participating States to ensure that prolonged incommunicado detention is abolished, emphasizing it can facilitate the perpetration of prohibited treatment of detainees and can itself constitute a form of prohibited treatment. Yet, today, tens of thousands of Ukraine’s civilians remain detained and held incommunicado by Russia and its proxies.

Within Russia, torture and other abusive treatment continue to be practiced with impunity. The problem in its Republic of Chechnya remains acute. Despite the damning 2018 Moscow Mechanism report, federal authorities have done nothing to stop the abuse or to bring Kadyrov’s thugs to justice. Beyond Chechnya, reports of torture and other prohibited treatment in places of detention throughout Russia are commonplace, including against political prisoners. For instance, imprisoned anti-corruption campaigner and opposition politician Aleksey Navalny has been subjected to sleep deprivation, held repeatedly in solitary confinement on absurd pretenses, placed in a cell with another prisoner exhibiting symptoms of contagious illness, and physically assaulted.

In Belarus, successive Moscow Mechanism Reports documented torture and other appalling treatment by the Lukashenka regime on a regular and organized basis in places of detention. Political prisoners are particular targets, denied adequate food, water, and medical care, and subjected to constant beatings, overcrowded and cold cells, and sleep deprivation. We call on Belarusian authorities to allow families and attorneys access to Viktor Babaryka and Maria Kalesnikava, who continue to be held incommunicado. Mikalai Klimovich died in prison after being denied medical treatment.

We commend the OSCE's efforts in Central Asia to address torture, including providing technical assistance and training, and promoting prison reform, but we remain concerned by reports of government security services in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan still using torture. In Turkmenistan, we emphasize the importance of resolving the longstanding problem of enforced disappearances. Eighteen months since the 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan, the conviction of more than two dozen security service personnel for torturing detained persons is a positive step forward. However, while a handful of security service personnel have been convicted of torture, the government closed 80 percent of the cases for lack of evidence. We encourage those Central Asian governments that have stated their interest in ending torture to implement announced reforms and fully avail themselves of the OSCE's expertise.

In Türkiye, credible reports persist of possible torture of individuals imprisoned and in detention. Human rights NGOs report police tortured and mistreated peaceful demonstrators including at LGBTQI+ Pride demonstrations. We urge Türkiye to thoroughly investigate these allegations and hold those responsible accountable.

We commend Azerbaijan for taking steps to hold a number of perpetrators accountable for physical abuse, including for alleged torture and other ill-treatment by military officials in the 2017 Terter case. However, there continue to be credible reports of torture and other prohibited treatment by Ministry of Internal Affairs officials. There also have been reports of rape and threats of rape against detainees. We urge Azerbaijan's authorities to investigate such reports and hold those responsible to account.

Mr. Chair, the United States is committed to working with fellow participating States and civil society organizations to prevent and eradicate torture. As Secretary Blinken stated: "Our pursuit of accountability, as well as our support for survivors, continues so long as victims of torture exist."

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