



Charter of Rights of Victims and Survivors of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

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Foreword

I am honoured to present this Charter of Rights of Victims and Survivors of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

This Charter is born from courage – the courage of survivors who, having endured one of the gravest human rights violations, have chosen to speak not only of their suffering, but of their hopes for justice, recognition and change. Their voices form the heart of this document.

Across countries, cultures and generations, survivors share a common message: torture does not end when the abuse stops. Its effects endure – in bodies and minds, in families and communities – and are compounded by long struggles to be believed, to access care and to obtain justice.

Grounded in these accounts, the Charter sets out the rights and protections survivors themselves have identified as essential for recovery, reparation and the prevention of future harm.

I recommend this Charter to all United Nations Member States and urge them to adopt it as a framework for action, integrating its demands into laws, policies and national institutions. I also commend it to international and regional organisations, courts and bodies, and civil society whose work remains indispensable.

This Charter is the result of a collaborative process shaped through regional hearings in Bogotá, Nairobi



and Kathmandu, and more than 120 written submissions from survivors and survivor-led organisations worldwide. I am deeply grateful for their trust and engagement.

This document is testament that survivors are not merely witnesses to atrocity – they are rights-holders and architects of their futures. The Charter expresses all of our aspirations to live freely and safely in societies built on rights, peace and compassion. Their voices must guide the systems meant to protect them.

Alice Jill Edwards

United Nations Special Rapporteur
on torture and other cruel,
inhuman or degrading treatment or
punishment

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Charter of Rights of Victims and Survivors of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

We, the victims and survivors of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,

We are mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, grandparents, friends and members of our communities,

We come from different regions and countries, from many races, nationalities, ethnicities, faiths and beliefs. We hold different political opinions and speak many languages. We represent every walk of life – across social classes, generations, sexes and genders, abilities and disabilities, and experiences – carrying our own strengths and vulnerabilities,

We are tired of being humiliated and stigmatized, beaten and left with visible and invisible wounds, sexually violated and psychologically tormented because of who we are or what we represent,

We have lost pregnancies, fertility and physical function. We have been left with temporary and permanent disabilities and chronic illnesses. We have been unlawfully detained, disappeared, and killed,

Our families, too, have suffered, waiting without answers, fighting for our lives and our rights and carrying the burden of our pain,

We are outraged that we have been subjected by those in power to the cruelest forms of mistreatment and crimes – in places of detention, during war and unrest, under authoritarian and oppressive regimes, through so-called wars on terror or drugs, in crowd control operations, while seeking safety as refugees or migrants, in situations of internal displacement and forced exile, and even in our homes, schools and workplaces,



Our experiences are not isolated. Many of us have endured a lifetime of harassment, discrimination and oppression, before and after the acts that can be legally classified as torture,

We have also suffered other grave violations of our human rights and the laws of armed conflict, including threats to our lives, enforced disappearances, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, unfair trials, hostage-taking, persecution and genocide,

Our life paths have been shattered. We have lost years to pain and recovery, missed education and other opportunities and may never fully reclaim the lives we had imagined for ourselves,

We have endured physical, psychological, sexual and reproductive torture – the ultimate abuse of power – fracturing our ability to trust not only the authorities but also others around us,

The long road we have walked for justice, truth, reparation and non-repetition has too often led to silence and disappointment,

Too many of us have been branded as criminals or terrorists by those sworn to protect us. We have been threatened into silence; when we have dared to speak, we have faced renewed persecution against us and our families,

Our experiences will mark us for the rest of our lives; and yet we are still here, still standing, still fighting for justice, for reparation and for a world where no one else will have to endure what we have suffered. We demand accountability for perpetrators, and we dream of societies grounded in dignity, law and democracy,

No one understands the suffering from torture better than we do. We insist that this knowledge be respected by all involved in the global struggle to eradicate all forms of torture and ill-treatment,

Joined by our shared humanity and experiences, we are demanding the realization of our human rights and the restoration of our dignity and our futures through the following actions:



Article 1

Right to live free from torture and ill-treatment

1. We have the right to live free from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and from all related human rights and humanitarian law violations, including threats to our lives, extrajudicial and unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary deprivations of liberty, unfair trials, hostage-taking, persecution, oppression, genocide, apartheid and systemic discrimination that destroys families and communities.

2. States must end these crimes in law and practice and take concrete action so that they never happen again.



Article 2

Right to truth and accountability

1. States must publicly acknowledge the truth about what has been done to us and our loved ones. They must bear responsibility for the commission of torture and related abuses, disclose the full facts about these crimes and ensure that those responsible, including those who ordered or enabled those acts to be carried out, are brought to justice.

2. Many of us are victims and survivors of torture perpetrated by non-State actors, such as armed groups, terrorists, organized criminal gangs and other violent individuals and entities.

They, too, must be held accountable for the atrocities committed against us in fair proceedings before independent courts of law.



Article 3

Right to participate and to lead

1. We have the right to fully participate – as stakeholders and leaders – in all efforts to address torture and other ill-treatment.

2. We assert this right for every actor involved in the fight against torture and other ill-treatment, including States, national human rights institutions, national preventive mechanisms, the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, bodies and mechanisms, and non-governmental and civil society actors.

3. This entails:

(a) Engaging with victims and survivors as equal partners and stakeholders at every stage in the design, implementation and monitoring of anti-torture and human rights laws and policies, strategies, campaigns and advocacy, rehabilitation programmes and training;

(b) Formalizing the role and participation of victims and survivors in national efforts to prevent and respond to torture and other ill-treatment;

(c) Ensuring that survivor participation is inclusive so that women, children, minority groups, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities have the space to be heard and can shape decisions that affect them;

(d) Providing direct funding to survivor-led networks and community organizations so that they have the resources to participate effectively;

(e) Recognizing that victims and survivors have unique knowledge of torture and other ill-treatment that cannot be obtained through formal education and which should be considered when identifying and recruiting experts, trainers, researchers and other persons to act in relevant roles and take up relevant employment.



Article 4

Right to a victim- and survivor-centred approach in all actions

1. We have the right to be treated with dignity and to have our humanity and autonomy respected in all interactions with State and other relevant bodies and actors, which requires them to adopt a truly victim- and survivor-centred approach in all their actions.

2. This means:

(a) Guaranteeing safe, confidential and accessible spaces where victims and survivors can share their testimonies, experiences and expectations for justice, reparation and healing;

(b) Providing clear, timely and ongoing information about the progress and

outcomes of our cases and about reparation processes, as well as about the implementation of judgments and rulings;

(c) Disseminating the information available about medical, psychosocial and legal services that can support us and our families;

(d) Ensuring that we can express our views on the forms of reparation and redress that are most meaningful to us;

(e) Recognizing that torture is often linked to broader systems of oppression, including poverty, gender-based violence, racism, casteism and other forms of discrimination, and addressing them;

(f) Strengthening follow-up and coordination by the authorities with victims and survivors on anti-torture and human rights strategies and plans of action, on truth, reconciliation and reparation mechanisms and on the implementation of judgments and decisions of national, regional and international courts and tribunals.



Article 5

Right to justice

1. We have the right to equal, accessible and effective access to justice and to all available remedies – whether judicial, administrative or other – without discrimination of any kind. States must:

(a) Define and prosecute torture as a crime not subject to any statutes of limitation, immunities, amnesties or the defences of superior orders or public authority;

(b) Safeguard our right to complain and guarantee our privacy, health, safety and dignity while doing so, protecting survivors, our families and witnesses from retaliation, intimidation and revictimization;

(c) Investigate all acts of torture and other ill-treatment – and any suspicious deaths at the hands of public authorities – promptly, impartially, independently and thoroughly;

(d) Guarantee the independence of investigative, forensic and judicial institutions and officials;

(e) Provide free and qualified legal advice and representation so that we can pursue justice without plunging ourselves or our families into further economic hardship;

(f) Ensure that we are interviewed safely, respectfully, confidentially and by qualified experts trained in trauma-informed and gender- and age-sensitive methods that allow time and space for us to tell our stories in our own words, without coercion, pressure or retraumatization;

(g) Allow us, wherever possible, to choose the sex/gender of the interviewer and ensure that interpreters are trained in cultural and linguistic sensitivities;

(h) Eliminate obstacles that prevent victims and survivors of sexual or gender-based torture from reporting or seeking justice;

(i) Impose on perpetrators penalties that reflect the gravity of the crime;

(j) Implement, without delay, all judgments and decisions of national, regional and international courts and tribunals and human rights bodies.

2. Ethical, and human rights-based victim- and survivor-centred investigations not only uphold justice, they also help to restore our dignity and support our recovery.



Article 6

Right to reparation and rehabilitation

1. We and our families have the right to full and effective reparation for the damage we have suffered, in accordance with the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.

2. To be full and effective, measures must:

(a) Identify and address the specific impacts that we, our families and communities have suffered as a consequence of torture and/or other ill-treatment;

(b) Be implemented as a comprehensive response that addresses the individual and collective impacts identified using the appropriate combination of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantee of non-repetition;

(c) Include, at a minimum, elements of acknowledgement of wrongdoing and measures to prevent similar violations from happening in the future. Without these elements, reparations are not considered sincere;

(d) Remove barriers to reparation and rehabilitation, including bureaucratic hurdles, statutes of limitation or funding shortfalls;

(e) Guarantee prompt access to comprehensive medical care for all victims and survivors, covering physical, mental, gynaecological and reproductive care;

(f) Make available rehabilitation services to victims and survivors and their families, ensuring that they are gender- and age-sensitive, trauma-informed, confidential and free from stigma and that they address intersecting forms of discrimination;

(g) Ensure that gaining access to rehabilitation is not conditional on the filing of a criminal complaint or the conviction of a perpetrator;

(h) Address the socioeconomic impacts of torture and other ill-treatment through initiatives such as livelihood and educational support, access to meaningful employment without stigma, restoration of property and full inclusion of persons with disabilities in social and economic life;

(i) Support the creation of survivor networks where survivors can meet to break the isolation, create new, meaningful connections and communities and work together to claim their rights and support other survivors;

(j) Recognize that while non-State entities may deliver reparation and rehabilitation programmes, the State is responsible for ensuring that these programmes are available, accessible and fully funded;

(k) Ensure that, when implementing judgments and decisions of courts, tribunals and human rights bodies, compensation payments and other outcomes are made promptly.

3. Reparation must restore what torture tried to erase: our dignity, our agency and our right to live without fear.



Article 7

Right to international solidarity and cooperation

1. We have the right to live in a world free from torture.

2. To achieve this, States must:

(a) Ratify and effectively implement all international and regional human rights and humanitarian law treaties that prohibit torture and related ill-treatment;

(b) Ensure the incorporation and application of international guidelines and best practices on the rights of victims and remedies and on the prevention and eradication of torture and related ill-treatment;

(c) Collaborate actively and in good faith with the United Nations, including the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the Committee against Torture, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the United Nations

Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, and the Special Fund established by the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and regional courts and mechanisms, and ensure that they are adequately resourced;

(d) Ensure that United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and regional observers, including the Special Rapporteur, are permitted to visit our countries and monitor places where people are deprived of their liberty, listen directly to us and our communities and reflect our realities in their reports and recommendations.

3. A single act of torture against one of us is an attack on the humanity of us all.



Final declaration: our resolve and commitment

We, the victims and survivors of torture and other inhumane acts, speak with one voice,

Our pain has been silenced, denied and forgotten too many times, but through the present Charter we reclaim our truth and our place in the world,

We stand together to demand justice, recognition and reparation, not as an act of charity, but as our right. We call upon States, institutions and all people of conscience to join us in ending torture in every form, everywhere,

We will continue to tell our stories, to support one another and to transform our suffering into strength. We will honour those who did not survive by ensuring that no one else endures what we have suffered,

Our voices will not be taken from us again.