

Tackling Torture Worldwide: The First Two Years

Report on the work of the Special Rapporteur's mandate

Dr Alice Jill Edwards, Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Since taking up her mandate on 1 August 2022, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Dr. Alice Jill Edwards, has been actively engaged in a wide range of initiatives around the world. This newsletter – issued just after the second anniversary of her mandate – highlights some of the notable activities and initiatives in the past couple of years.

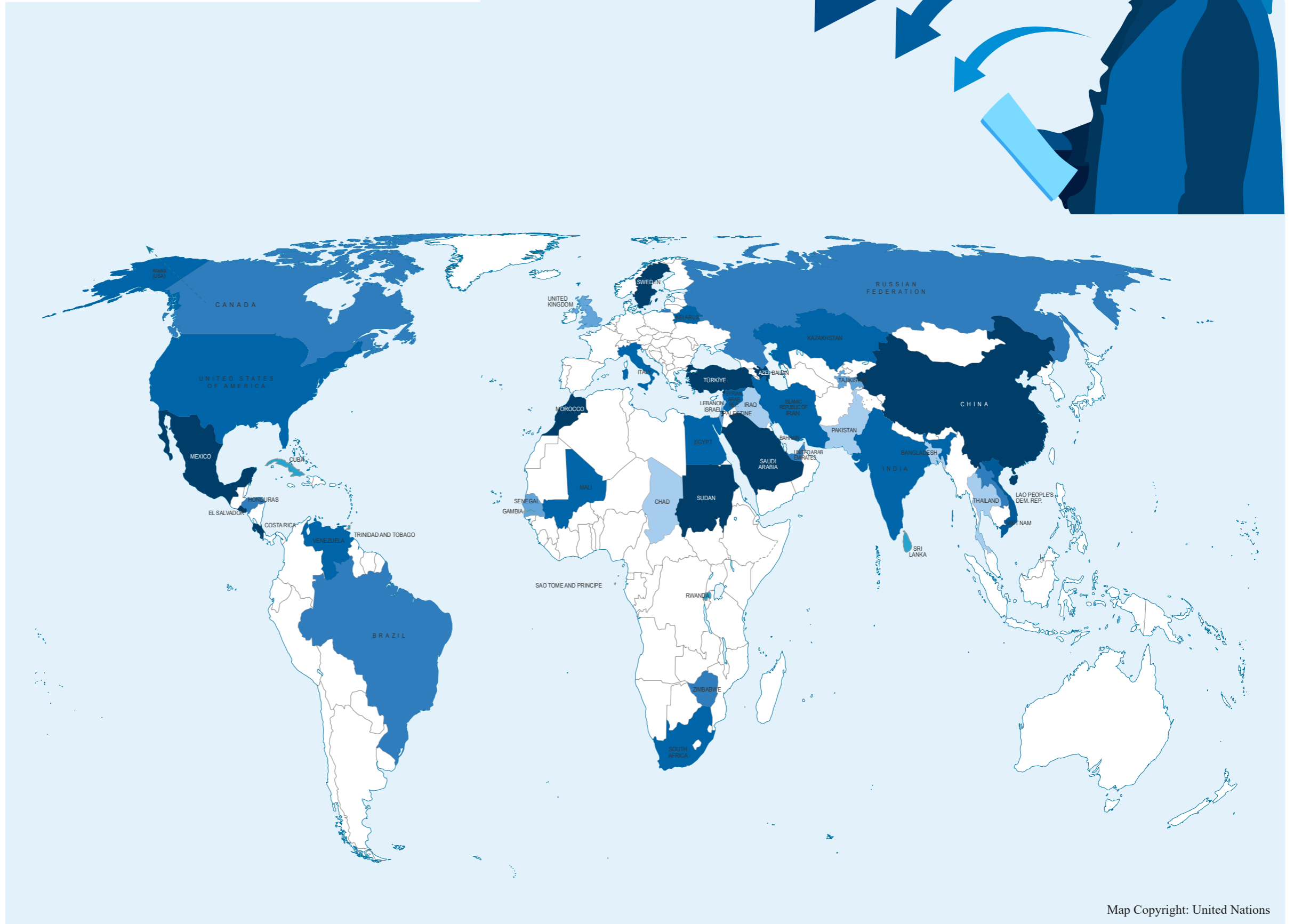
Confronting torture violations

The Special Rapporteur transmitted more than 100 official letters to states over the past two years, both jointly with other mandate holders and individually on behalf of individuals exposed to torture and other ill-treatment. She has also met with a wide range of governments in follow up to these allegations.*

These included communications to:

Afghanistan (Taliban), Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus (3), Brazil, Canada, Chad, China (2), Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt (2), El Salvador, France, Gambia, Honduras, India (2), Iran (Islamic Republic of) (10), Iraq (3), Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan (2), Kenya, Lao (2), Lebanon, Mali, Mexico (2), Morocco (2), Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Russian Federation (9), Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia (3), Senegal, South Africa (2), Sri Lanka, Sweden, Sudan (2), Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand (2), Trinidad and Tobago, Türkiye (3), United Arab Emirates (2), United Kingdom (3), United States (6), Venezuela, Viet Nam (4), Zimbabwe (2)

*Date range: 1 August 2022 – 1 August 2024. The allegation letters counted here include only those that were public as at 1 August 2024. States have 60 days in which to respond to these allegations, during which time the letter remains confidential.



Hearing survivors

Engagement with survivors has been one of the most important elements of the Special Rapporteur's work. Most notable was the 'Hearing for Healing' held in Bogota, Colombia, in which 15 torture survivors from across Latin America recounted their experiences of torture directly to Dr Edwards. The survivors issued the Bogota Declaration after the meeting.

This was the first of several regional hearings organized by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims and the World Organisation Against Torture, that the Special Rapporteur intends to hold during her mandate to ensure that her work is informed by the experiences of survivors. She is the first Special Rapporteur to do so.

Bogota Declaration

Dr Edwards visited Northern Iraq for a study visit to explore the challenges and successes of implementing Iraq's groundbreaking Yazidi Survivors Law, as well as the efforts to bring rehabilitation and justice to survivors of ISIL crimes.

Keynote Speech



'Hearing for Healing' in Bogota, Colombia



Study visit in Northern Iraq

Reporting on priority themes



October 2022, Vision report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Alice Jill Edwards, and statement of the international legal framework prohibiting and preventing torture and other ill-treatment] General Assembly, A/77/502

Full Report



March 2023, Good practices in national criminalization, investigation, prosecution and sentencing for offences of torture, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/52/30

Full Report



October 2023, 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, General Assembly, A/78/324

Full Report



March 2024, Current issues and good practices in prison management, Human Rights Council A/HRC/55/52

Full Report



October 2024, Thematic Report on Investigating, prosecuting and preventing wartime sexual torture, and providing rehabilitation to victims and survivors, General Assembly, A/79/181

Full Report

Engaging with states through dialogue and visits

The Special Rapporteur carried out two official visits to Ukraine and Chile (report to be published shortly)

For Full Ukraine Report Click Here

During her mandate the Special Rapporteur has carried out several working visits to Geneva and New York, during which she has met scores of representatives of the Permanent Missions of States Members of the United Nations and United Nations agencies.

She has also presented to and engaged with the full membership of the Committee against Torture, the Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Torture, and the UN Fund for Victims of Torture. The Special Rapporteur has briefed the Council of Ministers and the Steering Committee on Human Rights of the Council of Europe. She has engaged several times with representatives of state members of the Convention against Torture Initiative in Geneva and New York.

At the national level Dr Edwards briefed the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group in London and was the keynote speaker at the United Kingdom's National Preventative Mechanism Annual Conference in 2023

UK Keynote Speech



Official Visit to Ukraine



Official Visit to Ukraine



Official Visit to Chile.

In 2023 the Special Rapporteur was invited by the Government of Chile to speak at a Human Rights Council side event, "50 years after the Military Coup: Chile and the United Nations mechanisms to support victims of torture, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial executions", where she spoke about the legacy and lessons for the United Nations' anti-torture architecture from the darkest period in Chile's history.

Chile Keynote Speech (Geneva)

In 2022 she gave the keynote speech at the Australian national symposium on the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, organized by the Australian Human Rights Commission

Australia Keynote Speech

Also in 2022, the Special Rapporteur participated in an international seminar on standards and practices on prevention against torture during arrest, hearing and custody organized by the National Human Rights Council of Morocco.

Morocco Seminar Presentation (French)



Advocacy and Public Awareness

The Special Rapporteur has been extremely active in the mainstream media discussing many allegations and incidents of torture around the world. Over the past two years there have been more than 1,500 media mentions of her work in around 80 countries in all regions. There has also been strong coverage in the Global South with more than a third of the coverage in non-Western countries. Dr Edwards carried out TV interviews for several international networks from many regions including North America, Europe, Asia, MENA, and Oceania.

New York Times (US)

Ukrainian Accounts of Torture Point to Systematic Russian Policy, Expert Says [Article](#)

Russia Today (Russia)

Assange faces torture and suicide in US – UN [Article](#)

Al Jazeera Arabic (Qatar)

Israeli violations against Palestinian detainees... a report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur against Torture [title translated] [Video](#)

The Times (UK)

Torture and cover-up is Russian policy in Ukraine, says UN expert [Article](#)

ABC (Australia)

Ukrainian torture survivor Anatoliy Tutov wants the world to know what Russian soldiers did to him in occupied Ukraine [Article](#)

The Citizen (South Africa)

UN expert urges ban of 'inherently cruel' torture tools [Article](#)

South China Morning Post (Hong Kong)

Torture is part of Russian war policy, says UN observer in Ukraine [Article](#)

The Guardian (UK)

UN torture expert accuses private firms of making ever more cruel instruments [Article](#)

CGTN (China)

Explosions rock Kyiv as African leaders arrive to broker peace [Article](#)

Fox News (US)

UN torture expert urges UK to halt Julian Assange's US extradition over fears of torture, human rights abuses [Article](#)

1,500
Media Mentions
in 80
Countries



The New York Times

Ukrainian Accounts of Torture Point to Systematic Russian Policy, Expert Says

The U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture said Moscow's refusal to address the issue represented tacit approval of its use. Russia has denied it practices torture.

Torture perpetrated by Russian officers against Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war has reached such a level that it is clearly a systematic, state-endorsed policy, a United Nations expert on torture said Saturday.



Assange faces torture and suicide in US – UN

The WikiLeaks founder faces up to 175 years in prison if his extradition from Britain is approved

ELLE (France)

UN expert calls for ban on 20 "modern torture tools" [title translated] [Article](#)

Canberra Times (Australia):

Alice Edwards talks about United Nations' work on the prevention of torture across the world [Article](#)

The Times of India (India)

UN experts urge war crimes probe in Israel, Palestinian territories [Article](#)

TRT World (Turkey)

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange walks free from UK jail after deal with US [Article](#)

The subjects that have received the most coverage include:

- Allegations of Russian torture in Ukraine
- 7 October Hamas-led attacks on Israel
- Allegations of Israeli torture of Palestinian detainees
- Alexei Navalny's detention and death
- Julian Assange's extradition and release
- Jimmy Lai's trial in Hong Kong
- The Special Rapporteur's call for a ban on the trade in torture tools

Notable Articles

Al Jazeera English

In this time of war, too many torturers are evading justice

5 July 2023 [Article](#)

NL Quarterly of Human Rights

Justice starts at home: A call for stepped-up nationally-led investigations into torture

1 Sept 2023 [Article](#)

Le Monde

Armes : « Le commerce ignoble des outils de torture doit être interdit »

21 December 2023 [Article](#)

Foreign Policy

Egypt Is Obligated to Let Gaza Refugees In

30 April 2024 [Article](#)

The Guardian

Prisoners serving sentences with no clear end is a stain on British justice – it also amounts to torture

20 May 2024 [Article](#)

The Torture Journal

Trade in torture tools threatens detainees and protesters everywhere – it must be banned

May 2024 [Article](#)



In this time of war, too many torturers are evading justice

Democracies cite torture perpetrated by autocracies, while dodging responsibility for their own crimes.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

UN experts urge war crimes probe in Israel, Palestinian territories

UN rights experts call for independent investigations into alleged war crimes in Israel and the Palestinian territories since October 7. The experts stress the need for prompt, transparent, and independent investigations, as well as accountability. They emphasize that independent investigators must have the necessary resources and access to conduct impartial investigations. War crimes and crimes against humanity have no statute of limitation and can be prosecuted under universal jurisdiction.

TRTWORLD

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange walks free from UK jail after deal with US

Assange, who has spent five years in a British prison for revealing alleged war crimes committed by US military, reaches tentative plea deal to admit to one count of violating US Espionage Act, court filing shows.

ELLE

Une experte de l'ONU réclame l'interdiction de 20 « outils de torture modernes »

« Les objets sur ma liste interdite ne sont rien de moins que des outils de torture des temps modernes. Ils sont tout aussi horribles que les chevalets et nouettes utilisés par les tortionnaires du Moyen-Âge » a déclaré Alice Edwards, rapporteure spéciale sur la torture en présentant son rapport devant une commission de l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU.

South China Morning Post

Torture is part of Russian war policy, says UN observer in Ukraine

• A UN report on torture and inhuman treatment said civilians and prisoners of war had received electric shocks as well as threats of rape and death
• More than 103,000 war crimes cases have been registered so far, according to the Ukrainian government



Podcast Appearances

United Nations

Awake at Night: Haunted by Tales of Torture.

▶ Podcast

The Daily Telegraph

Ukraine: The Daily.

▶ Podcast

DIGNITY

The fight against torture faces new challenges

▶ Podcast

Select speeches by Dr Edwards:

- *Repairing the Irreparable: Remedies, Rehabilitation and Reparations for Survivors, Families and Communities Impacted by Sexual Torture in Armed Conflict*, Coalition for Just Reparations

Irbil, Iraq (14 June 2024) [Speech](#)

- *Briefing on key trends and developments, as well as areas of concern*, Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on the topic of torture and ill-treatment

Strasbourg, France (8 February 2024) [Speech](#)

- *Torture and other ill-treatment: The role of National Human Rights Institutions*, International Conference of National Human Rights Institutions, GANHRI

Copenhagen (6 November 2023) [Speech](#)

- *Outward-Inward Misalignment? Australia's Place and Performance in the Global Struggle Against Torture*, Keynote address: Castan Centre for Human Rights Law Conference, Monash University

Melbourne, Australia (21 July 2023) [Speech](#)

- *Torture and the History of Evil and Sin*, Commencement Address: 52nd Summer School Fondation René Cassin – Institut International des droits de l'homme

Strasbourg, France (26 June 2023) [Speech](#)

- *#WomenEqualityAsylum: How Far Has Equality Been Achieved in Realizing a Woman's Right to Seek and Enjoy Asylum from Persecution?*, Keynote address: 7th Annual Conference Refugee Law Initiative, University of London

London, UK (22 June 2023) [Speech](#)

- *Safeguarding the rights of victims of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment within criminal investigation processes*, Thematic Discussions of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice on the implementation of the Kyoto Declaration

Vienna, Austria (5 December 2022) [Speech](#)

- *Preventing coercive interrogations and forced confessions: the role of the legal profession*, International Bar Association Annual Conference on the Méndez Principles

Miami, United States (1 November 2022) [Speech](#)

