



Statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment on one-year anniversary of the October 7th attacks

Dr. Alice Jill Edwards

Torture and other violations are the enemies of peace

On the first anniversary of the brutal attacks on Israel by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Alice Jill Edwards, has called for an immediate end to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment by all actors involved.

“The events of October 7 were devastating, and the repercussions continue to resonate across the Middle East,” said Edwards.

“Torture and other inhuman treatment have been recurrent violations in this conflict – whether inflicted on Israeli hostages and civilians or Palestinian detainees and civilians.”

“Torture inhibits prospects for peace and reconciliation,” Edwards warned. “Inflicting profound psychological and physical harms, torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment are the enemies of long-term healing and foster intergenerational trauma. They must be removed from the toolkit of warring parties.”

The documented crimes on 7 October were grave violations of international law – killings, hostage-taking, and torture including sexual torture. Across 22 villages approximately 1,200 Israeli and foreign nationals were killed, of which the large majority were civilians. Thousands more were injured. An estimated 240 adults, children and infants were taken hostage into Gaza.

Shortly after the attacks, Israel launched a military assault on Gaza which continues to this day, with devastating impacts on civilians. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have lost their lives with mass casualty rates, people are facing daily threats and constant displacement, and housing stock and critical infrastructure have been destroyed.

The experience and impact of torture and other ill-treatment have been pervasive since 7 October, with profound consequences for thousands of people and their families from all sides of this conflict.

In September, the UN expert met former Israeli hostages and families of current hostages. “The taking and holding of hostages are internationally unlawful acts and

constitute forms of torture,” she said. “Human beings must never be used as bargaining chips for political gain. The suffering endured by families who are uncertain about the fate of their loved ones still trapped in Gaza is an additional layer of torture, as recognized by international courts.”

97 hostages remain missing. “With the passage of time, the threats to the life and well-being of these hostages grow,” Edwards said. “It is critical that urgent action is taken to secure their release.”

Edwards urged the Government of Israel to investigate numerous allegations of torture and inhumane treatment of detained Palestinians since October 7. “Persons deprived of liberty must always be treated humanely,” she said. “They must receive all protections required under international human rights and humanitarian law, regardless of the circumstances of their detention.”

Since the onset of the conflict, thousands of Palestinians, including children, have been detained in Israeli prisons or in Israeli military camps. Reports of torture – including a particularly gruesome case of sexual torture, and more widely the threat of physical and sexual violence, beatings, excessive blindfolding and handcuffing, and sleep deprivation – are alarming.

“On this somber anniversary I remind all actors that torture and inhumane treatment are unacceptable in any circumstances and are universally prohibited under international law.”

“I urge Hamas and other armed groups, and the Israeli authorities, to allow hostages and detainees to be visited by independent observers without delay. I express once again my availability to visit Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.”

“All UN Member States must work decisively to end the torment faced by Palestinians and Israelis without further delay, and to reign back the spread of this conflict to the wider region.”

Over the past year the Special Rapporteur has actively engaged stakeholders regarding the ongoing conflict, including the Palestinian Authority and Hamas about hostages, and the Israeli government about allegations of torture and mistreatment against Palestinian detainees. She remains fully engaged with addressing allegations of torture and/or ill-treatment in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel and beyond.

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