



**International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict
19 June 2024**

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Dr Alice J. Edwards warns about normalization of sexual torture in war

As United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture, I am alarmed at the prevalence, frequency and intensity of sexual torture in current armed conflicts. In this past year of insecurity and instability, there has been a considerable number of reported crimes of sexual torture.

Sexual torture is the ultimate imposition of power of one person over another and causes great suffering.

While rape and other forms of sexual torture have been a part of war for thousands of years, these vile crimes continue today despite the best efforts of many actors.

Sexual torture can leave long-term scars that last a lifetime, and these wounds regularly affect future generations. The consequences for survivors can be emotional, traumatic, physiological, reproductive and economic.

In the past year I have received compelling allegations from a multitude of wars of the most egregious of crimes.

These include violations in Sudan, in which preliminary allegations suggest that the RSF militia committed 370 rapes of Sudanese women in the first four months of 2024 alone. Testimonial and circumstantial evidence from the Hamas-led attacks in Israel on 7 October convincingly indicate that rapes, genital mutilations and targeting of women took place. An escalation in the conflict in Northern Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo has seen renewed violence including egregious forms of rapes and other sexual assaults. While in the conflict in Ukraine the systemic torture perpetrated by Russian forces has included nearly three hundred cases of alleged sexual torture on women as well as men.

We must as an international community start forcefully questioning why sexual torture happens so frequently. Why have efforts failed to prevent this? Why are there so few prosecutions?

Sexual assaults committed by warring parties are almost always torture.

Sexual torture is a prohibited form of severe pain or suffering that is intentionally inflicted for purposes such as interrogation, subjugation, oppression and discrimination. It is intended to cause maximum humiliation and cruelty. In extreme cases, the use of torture – including sexual torture – may be part of political or military strategies.

While no one is spared from the threat of sexual torture, women and girls bear the brunt of such crimes. The perpetrators are nearly always male. The intention is to humiliate the victim, to dominate them, to strip them of their humanity and dignity.

However, men and boys are routinely subjected to sexual forms of torture, at levels never fully disclosed. All efforts to provide for rehabilitation and recovery must allow all survivors to access support.

I will report to the UN General Assembly in October on my findings on sexual torture and recommendations on the use of the international torture framework to improve access to justice and remedies for victims and survivors.