

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/23/un-human-rights-council-rights-defenders-behind-bars-uzbekistan-unlawful-force>

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Oral Statement Delivered Under Item 4 - General Debate

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Human Rights Watch is extremely concerned by Uzbekistan's appalling human rights record across a wide spectrum of violations. Authorities target civil society activists, political opposition figures, and independent journalists, and persecute religious believers who worship outside strict state controls. Freedom of expression is severely limited and public demonstrations ruthlessly suppressed. More than a dozen rights defenders, independent journalists, and political opposition figures remain behind bars for no other reason than their engagement in legitimate civic activism. Thousands of others have been convicted on overly broad charges of religious extremism in closed trials, which are often based on confessions procured through the use of torture and without the presence of independent counsel. Torture plagues Uzbekistan's places of detention, where it is often used to coerce confessions and occurs with impunity. There is no evidence that the introduction of habeas corpus in 2008 has reduced torture in pre-trial custody or ensured due process for detainees. Authorities persist in their refusal to allow an independent investigation into the 2005 Andijan massacre in which government forces shot and killed hundreds of protestors, most of them unarmed. There is also widespread government-sponsored forced labor, including child labor, during the cotton harvest period.

Only one special procedure mandate holder was allowed to visit the country, in December 2002. Since then, for almost 12 years now, no special procedure of the Council has been granted access while 11 requests for visits have been made showing Uzbekistan's utter disrespect for these mechanisms. The time has come for the Council to take action and to create a dedicated monitoring mechanism on Uzbekistan.

Human Rights Watch is also deeply concerned about the serious human rights situation in Venezuela, which is the worst we have seen in the country in years.

Our research shows that, beginning on February 12, 2014, members of the Bolivarian National Guard, the Bolivarian National Police and state police forces have routinely used unlawful force against unarmed protesters and even bystanders, including severe beatings; firing live ammunition, rubber bullets, and teargas indiscriminately into crowds; and firing rubber bullets deliberately, at point blank range, at unarmed individuals already in custody. These human rights violations were part of a systematic practice by Venezuelan security forces. Security forces deliberately targeted journalists and others photographing and filming the repression against protesters; and they tolerated and sometimes collaborated directly with armed pro-government gangs that attacked protesters with impunity.

We also found a range of serious violations committed against detainees, who were often held incommunicado on military bases for 48 hours or more, before being presented to a judge. These violations included severe beatings, electric shocks or burns, and being forced to squat or kneel, without moving, for hours at a time. In some cases, the ill-treatment clearly constituted torture. Justice officials failed to fulfill their role as a safeguard against abuse of power and instead were party to serious due process violations.

Human Rights Watch respectfully urges States at the Human Rights Council to call on the government of Nicolás Maduro to uphold its international legal obligations to respect human rights. Specifically, the States should urge Venezuela to conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all allegations of human rights violations, to immediately and unconditionally release people who have been unlawfully detained for exercising their basic rights, to cease all rhetoric that encourages violence against protesters and journalists, and to take steps to restore the independence of the judiciary, beginning with the Supreme Court.

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