

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL & OMEGA RESEARCH FOUNDATION
PRESS RELEASE**

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Abuse of protesters and prisoners highlights urgent need to regulate torture tools

The world must act urgently to prohibit the global trade in equipment designed to inflict excruciating pain and injury, Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation said today, ahead of a high-level UN meeting on the 'torture trade'. In a new report, *Ending the Torture Trade: The Path to Global Controls on the 'Tools of Torture'*, the organizations also called for controls on standard policing equipment to ensure it does not end up in the hands of abusers.

"More than three decades after torture was outlawed internationally, people continue to be tortured, often to death, in prisons and detention centres all over the world. It is nonsensical to ban torture while allowing the trade in sinister equipment specifically designed for torture, like spiked batons and leg irons, to continue," said Patrick Wilcken, Amnesty International's Head of Business, Security and Human Rights.

"Meanwhile, with protesters around the world being choked by tear gas and injured by rubber bullets, there is an urgent need to strengthen controls on the trade in policing equipment. Standard equipment like handcuffs and batons can be instruments of torture if they fall into the wrong hands. Countries must come together to create a global, legally-binding instrument to regulate the trade in these goods."

A framework for ending the trade in pain and suffering

Amnesty and Omega's report was released to coincide with a high-level meeting of the 60-state-strong [Alliance for Torture-Free Trade](#) at the UN, part of an ongoing process exploring ways to regulate the global trade in law enforcement equipment.

To aid the UN process, Amnesty and Omega are presenting an 'anti-Torture Trade Framework' which sets out essential steps that states must take to effectively regulate the trade in law enforcement equipment and death penalty goods.

This includes a ban on inherently abusive equipment, such as spiked batons, electric shock belts and weighted leg irons; and robust human rights controls on

the trade in commonly employed policing equipment, including handcuffs, pepper spray and tasers.

The report also highlights the need for a ban on the trade in death penalty equipment, such as gallows and electric chairs, and for export controls on dual use pharmaceutical chemicals to prevent their use in lethal injection executions.

“Our research has uncovered the promotion of a range of inherently abusive law enforcement equipment at trade fairs and on company websites: remotely activated electric shock devices attached to prisoner’s bodies; heavy leg irons; prisoner restraints bolted to walls; spiked batons and serrated shields; police electric shock batons and stun guns, electric shock gloves and even electric shock capture devices, the list goes on,” said Dr Michael Crowley, Research Associate at the Omega Research Foundation.

“For too long, states have turned a blind eye to the trade in ‘tools of torture’, allowing companies throughout the world to profit from human pain and misery. All states have a responsibility to act decisively to bring this trade under control. Our anti-Torture Trade Framework provides them with the basis for effective action – individually establishing national restrictions, and collectively agreeing international standards through the ongoing UN process.”

Tortured with electric shocks

Electric shock devices are a commonly used tool of torture globally. On September 9, 2020, for example, Javier Ordoñez was stopped by police in Bogotá, Colombia, for allegedly violating COVID-19 restrictions. Officers pinned him to the ground and administered repeated electric shocks to his body for approximately five minutes, using a taser. He died in hospital hours later as a result of blunt trauma injuries.

In Saudi Arabia, an Ethiopian detainee, Solomon, told Amnesty International that prison guards had used electric shock devices against him after he protested about the lack of health care.

“If we complain, they apply some device on you and you fall down. It’s like when you touch something with electricity. It leaves a red mark on your skin...Since then, we don’t complain anymore because we’re afraid they’ll do again the electric thing on our back. We keep quiet.”

Amnesty International and Omega are calling for a global ban on the trade and use of certain electric-shock devices which are unsuitable for law enforcement. These include body-worn devices such as shock belts and vests, and direct contact devices intended for police use such as shock batons and grabbing devices. Some projectile electric shock devices may have a legitimate law enforcement purpose, but their trade and use need to be tightly controlled.

Beaten with batons

The report also contains harrowing testimony from people subjected to beatings with batons, truncheons and sticks by police, including a prisoner in Burundi who reported:

"[Police] beat us on our back, buttocks and feet for 20 minutes. They were six policemen and they took turns. I had problems walking for a week. I couldn't put my shoes on, because my feet were so swollen."

Following post-election protests in Belarus in August 2020, Katsyaryna Novikava told Amnesty International she spent 34 hours at the Centre for Isolation of Offenders, where arrested men were forced to lie down in the dirt of the facility's yard. Inside the centre, dozens of men were told to strip naked and get down on all fours while officers kicked and beat them with truncheons. Katsyaryna was herself made to kneel and listen to their screams.

Torture and ill-treatment on the streets

According to Amnesty International, many police forces have used a range of equipment and weapons outside of custodial settings in a way that may have constituted torture or other ill-treatment.

This includes the deliberate and repeated targeting of peaceful protesters with rubber bullets, plastic bullets and other potentially lethal projectiles, that have resulted in serious injuries and loss of sight. It also includes the gratuitous and punitive use of chemical irritants such as pepper spray against individuals posing no threat, and the use of large quantities of tear gas in confined spaces.

Amnesty and Omega are calling on states to use the anti-Torture Trade Framework to introduce regulations, or strengthen existing national controls, on the trade in goods used for capital punishment, torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

Tighter controls on law enforcement equipment should include issuing licenses on a case-by-case basis, after assessments of the risk of the equipment being misused for torture or other ill-treatment.

Companies also have a responsibility to respect human rights.

“While trade controls relate to state obligations, this does not absolve companies of their part in this appalling trade,” said Patrick Wilcken.

“Companies must proactively undertake human rights due diligence to prevent their products from being misused. Those that manufacture, promote or trade in inherently abusive law enforcement equipment that could only be used for torture, ill-treatment or the death penalty must immediately stop these activities.”