

REGIONAL BRIEFING ON THE TRADE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT EQUIPMENT USED FOR TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT: CANDIDATE STATES TO THE EUROPEAN UNION



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Foundation**



This document has been produced under a project funded by the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the Omega Research Foundation and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

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INTRODUCTION

While acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (henceforth ‘other ill-treatment’)[1] can be committed using any number of items, it is often the case that officials use specialist equipment promoted for law enforcement. Some equipment is inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading (inherently abusive) and should never be used by law enforcement officers. Other law enforcement equipment may have a legitimate role in human rights-compliant policing, but is readily and often misused in a way that violates human rights, including being used in acts of torture and other ill-treatment.

With civil society and human rights leaders from around the world, Omega Research Foundation (Omega) is calling for national, regional, and international controls on the trade in this equipment: for States to prohibit the trade in inherently abusive law enforcement equipment and robustly control the trade in other law enforcement equipment to ensure it is not used in torture or other ill-treatment.

The trade in law enforcement equipment used in torture is global. In this briefing, we expose the trade and use of law enforcement equipment between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2025 in States in the process of joining the European Union[2] (henceforth ‘Candidate States’). ‘Trade’ refers not only to the role of Candidate States and Candidate State-based companies in the export trade, but also the import of such law enforcement equipment into these States, as well as the provision of training in the use of law enforcement equipment. This trade is facilitated by associated activities including brokering[3] and transportation, as well as the marketing of products including through the internet or at international trade fairs.

The examples we use in this briefing are for illustrative purposes only.

This briefing is part of Omega’s series of regional trade briefings. You can read our briefing papers on Europe[4] and Africa[5] on Omega’s website.

EQUIPMENT TYPES

In October 2023, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Dr Alice Jill Edwards, published a *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*[6].

In the study, she published lists of law enforcement equipment:

- **Annex I:** inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading equipment, which should never be manufactured, promoted, traded, or used for law enforcement purposes; any use would violate human rights[7].
- **Annex II:** a further range of law enforcement equipment that may have a human rights-compliant function, but that are misused in acts of torture and other ill-treatment in policing on the streets, the point of arrest, and in places where people are deprived of their liberty. Such equipment should be subject to trade controls to ensure it is not used for torture and other ill-treatment[8].

Drawing on this study and Omega’s extensive research, in this briefing we examine four broad categories of equipment[9]. Within each category, we identify examples of inherently abusive goods as well as goods that are misused for torture and other ill-treatment, including in Candidate States.

Electric shock

Electric shock weapons are designed to give an individual a short electric shock[10].

Projectile electric shock weapons are used from a distance to temporarily incapacitate an individual; these weapons have some legitimate law enforcement utility – for example, against armed or violent individuals – when used in a human rights-compliant manner.

Other kinds of electric shock weapons – notably direct contact electric shock weapons and body-worn electric shock weapons – are designed to cause compliance through pain. They are inherently abusive, and their manufacture, trade, and use by law enforcement should be prohibited.



Example: Direct contact electric shock in Serbia

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) have documented allegations that Serbian authorities “administer[ed] electric shocks from a hand-held device to extract a confession”.^[11] One remand prisoner, for example, alleged in 2023 that he had been subjected to “truncheon blows to his chest and sides, the placing of a plastic bag on his head and several electric shocks from a hand-held electric device”.^[12]

Direct contact electric shock equipment – such as stun guns or electric shock batons – is inherently abusive and should never be used in a law enforcement capacity; the manufacture, trade, and use of direct contact electric shock devices should be entirely prohibited.

Chemical irritants

Chemical irritants are designed to cause individuals to alter their behaviour or disperse. Omega includes tear gas (CS, CN, and CR), pepper spray (OC, PAVA), and foul-smelling malodorants in this category^[13].

Some dispersal systems, such as mechanisms designed to be fixed to walls or ceilings of prisons or other enclosed spaces, should not be used by law enforcement, as they can be indiscriminate and/or can disperse potentially injurious amounts of chemical irritant.

Other delivery mechanisms, such as hand-held sprayers or irritant grenades or projectiles, are designed to target individuals or small groups, and deliver limited amounts of irritant; they can potentially be used in a human rights-compliant manner by law enforcement officials, although they are open to misuse.



Example: Chemical Irritants in Türkiye

Amnesty International highlight how authorities in Türkiye misused chemical irritants against protestors in March 2023. This included incidents where authorities used excessive amounts without stopping, used chemical irritants against people trying to flee, in conjunction with large numbers of kinetic impact projectiles, and at close range. Another account suggests officials fired “tear gas projectiles directly at protesters, including aiming towards the head and from a close distance”[14].

Robust trade controls should be placed around such chemical irritant dispersal mechanisms, including projectiles containing tear gas, to ensure that they are not transferred to end users likely to misuse them for torture and other ill-treatment.

Kinetic impact weapons

The term ‘kinetic impact weapons’ encompasses handheld striking weapons such as batons, as well as hand-thrown projectiles such as grenades containing multiple small balls, or weapons-launched projectiles (commonly referred to as ‘rubber bullets’)[15].

There is a wide variety of kinetic impact ammunition containing different numbers and types of projectiles, and the nature of such contents in part determines how accurate and injurious the use of such ammunition will be. Ammunition that contains multiple projectiles, for example, is inaccurate and should be prohibited. Likewise, some projectile launchers, such as those having numerous barrels that can be fired simultaneously, are designed in such a way that means that they should never be used by law enforcement.



Hand-held kinetic impact weapons, such as standard batons, are widely used around the world in human rights-compliant policing, although they are sometimes misused to cause harm. Some types of handheld kinetic impact weapons, such as whips and batons with metal spikes, are inherently abusive and their trade and use should be prohibited.

Example: Kinetic Impact Projectiles in Georgia

The UN Special Rapporteur on torture and six other UN Special Rapporteurs have highlighted reports alleging that law enforcement officers in Georgia misused kinetic impact projectiles at protests in November and December 2024, including by firing indiscriminately. In one case, “the police reportedly took a picture of a protester at the beginning of a protest and later on, while the person was giving an interview to a TV channel, shot a rubber bullet at his face, close to the eyes”[16].

It is not clear what projectile was used in this specific case; controls should be placed on the trade of all single projectile kinetic impact projectiles to ensure that they are not transferred to end users likely to misuse them for torture and other ill-treatment. Multiple projectile kinetic impact projectiles are indiscriminate and should never be used in a law enforcement capacity; the manufacture, trade, and use of multiple projectile kinetic impact projectiles should be entirely prohibited.

Restraints

Restraints[17] are designed to restrict or prevent movement.

Some kinds of restraints, such as standard handcuffs, are commonly used by law enforcement around the world, and while they can be used in a human rights-compliant manner, they are misused in acts of torture and other ill-treatment all around the world.

Some other kinds of restraints, such as thumbcuffs and those with added weights, are inherently abusive and should never be manufactured, traded, or used for law enforcement.



Example: Handcuffs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 2024, prison officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina are alleged to have misused handcuffs, including overtightening, subjecting prisoners to tight handcuffing for prolonged periods, and handcuffing people to fixed objects for between one to three days[18]. In reports made to the CPT, some prisoners alleged being kicked or beaten by officers while on the ground with hands cuffed behind their back[19].

Controls should be placed on the trade in standard handcuffs to ensure that they are not transferred to end users likely to misuse them for torture and other ill-treatment.

TRADE FAIRS

Arms and security trade fairs are opportunities for companies to promote their products and services and are held in all world regions, including in the states addressed in this briefing. During the 2021-2025 period, companies that promote the types of law enforcement equipment discussed in this briefing exhibited in at least nine arms and security equipment trade fairs held in Candidate States[20].

Companies based in certain Candidate States have promoted inherently abusive equipment at international fairs. A company based in Türkiye, for example, which promotes inherently abusive law enforcement equipment – multiple projectile kinetic impact projectiles – appears to have promoted its products at arms fairs in six States (in France, Japan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates) between 2021 and 2025.

Companies organising law enforcement trade fairs, and the States host them, should regulate the fairs to prevent and, if discovered immediately, halt the promotion of inherently abusive equipment at such events.

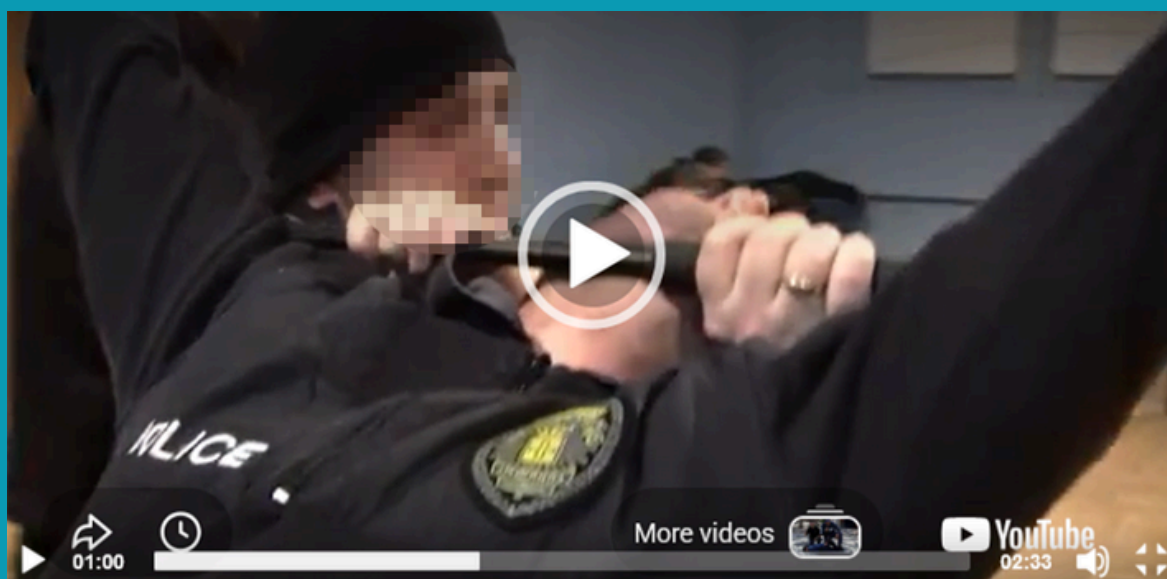
TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The provision of technical assistance and training can play an important role in facilitating the appropriate use of law enforcement equipment in line with regional and international human rights standards. If not adequately regulated, however, there is a danger that the provision of certain training may promote and legitimise potentially abusive practices.

Example: Czechia company training in a Georgia

During the period covered by this report, a Czechia-based company promoted on its website training services that feature inherently dangerous and abusive techniques. This training was provided to prison and law enforcement organisations from around the world, including in a Candidate State.

An undated video shows the provision of training in batons for neck-holds – a dangerous form of use that can cause serious injury or death – to a range of prison and law enforcement organisations in Georgia[21]. Photos dated from 2013 also show provision of training in similar baton techniques to Georgian police.



Still from an undated video of a training course in Georgia, posted on the company's website. This video shows techniques of potential concern, including neck-holds involving batons

EXISTING REGULATORY REGIMES

Different frameworks regulating the trade in law enforcement equipment used for torture currently exist at national, regional, and international levels in different parts of the world.

Regional – European Union

As part of formal EU membership negotiations, Candidate States “adopt... established EU law, [make] preparations to be in a position to properly apply and enforce it and [for the] implementation of judicial, administrative, economic and other reforms necessary”[22]. This includes Regulation (EU) 2019/125 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 January 2019 concerning trade in certain goods which could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment[23] (henceforth ‘EU Anti-Torture Regulation’ or ‘Regulation’).

The EU Anti-Torture Regulation was the world’s first multilateral instrument in this area: it was agreed in July 2005 and came into force in July 2006. Legally binding, the EU Anti-Torture Regulation applies in all EU Member States and now serves as an inspiration for other national, regional, and international processes.

The Regulation introduced unprecedented, binding trade controls on a range of types of law enforcement weapons and equipment frequently used in serious human rights violations – including torture – but that are often absent from States’ military, dual-use, or strategic export control lists. It covers the trade in three different categories of equipment:

- Those designated to have no practical use other than for capital punishment, torture or other ill-treatment (Annex II). The Regulation prohibits importing, exporting, and promoting these goods as well as related services such as training.
- A range of other kinds of law enforcement equipment that could be used in human rights violations (Annex III). The Regulation requires EU Member States to refuse to give export or transit authorisation for these goods where there are “reasonable grounds” to believe that they might be used for torture or other ill-treatment. In addition to the transfer of goods, the Regulation covers technical assistance and brokering.
- The export and transit of certain pharmaceutical chemicals (Annex IV) are regulated to prevent their use in ‘lethal injection’ executions, while facilitating trade for medical, veterinary or other legitimate purposes.

The EU Anti-Torture Regulation has been revised and strengthened over time; the latest consolidated version, Regulation (EU) 2019/125, was updated in 2025[24]. The 2025 changes significantly expanded the range of equipment covered by the Regulation; it now includes, for example, gang chains and weighted gloves in Annex II goods, as well as leg cuffs and single kinetic impact projectiles in Annex III[25].

Several Candidate States, including Montenegro and North Macedonia[26], are known to be in the process of developing national controls based on the Regulation.

Regional – Council of Europe

In March 2021, the Council of Europe (CoE) Committee of Ministers adopted CM/Rec(2021)2 – Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on measures against the trade in goods used for the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment[27] (henceforth ‘the Recommendation’).

The Recommendation identifies three categories of equipment:

- Inherently abusive goods and equipment (Appendix 1), including spiked batons certain and types of restraints
- Pharmaceutical chemicals employed in lethal injection executions (Appendix 2)
- Goods and equipment that “can be misused for the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”, such as projectile electric shock weapons and certain kinds of chemical irritant dispersal mechanisms (Appendix 3)

Unlike the EU Anti-Torture Regulation, the Recommendation is not legally binding. Instead, the Recommendation calls on governments of CoE member States to review their own national legislation regarding the trade in the goods outlined. States are called on to ensure that the trade in inherently abusive goods is prohibited and that there are robust controls on the trade in law enforcement equipment that can be misused for torture or other ill-treatment.

All Candidate States to the EU are member States of the CoE. Under the Recommendation, all Candidate States should therefore be in the process of taking steps to develop or strengthen their national controls on the trade in law enforcement equipment used in torture. These controls could be based on the EU Anti-Torture Regulation and the recommendations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture (see below).

International

The UN General Assembly’s regular resolution on torture and other ill-treatment has noted the obligation of all States to address the trade in inherently abusive equipment since 2001: States are called upon to “take appropriate effective legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures to prevent and prohibit the production, trade, export, import and use of equipment and technology that have no practical use other than for the purpose of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”[28].

Omega has long called for international controls on the trade in law enforcement equipment used for torture and other ill-treatment, and with organisations from around the world, we are active in the civil society campaign for a legally binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty[29].

The UN Special Rapporteur on torture has joined civil society in calling for States to develop an international legally binding torture-free trade instrument and to take action to introduce national controls on the trade in law enforcement equipment used for torture and other ill-treatment[30].

Other UN Special Procedures[31], the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights[32], and the Council of Europe[33] have called for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty.

With these leaders, and with civil society from around the world[34], we call on all States, including Candidate States, to act now to bring this global trade under control.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All Candidate States should:

- Review existing national measures to ensure that they are in accordance with the EU Anti-Torture Regulation and reflect the recommendations of the 2023 UN Special Rapporteur on torture's *Thematic Study*, including:
 - Prohibit all trade, including imports, manufacture, and exports of all types of law enforcement equipment contained in the *Study's* Annex I of prohibited goods. Undertake a review to ensure that they do not possess these inherently abusive law enforcement equipment and destroy all such goods currently held by law enforcement agencies.
 - Regulate all trade, including imports and exports, of all law enforcement equipment types contained in the *Study's* Annex II of controlled goods. Establish appropriate measures to ensure that such equipment is not diverted to non-State actors.
 - Regulate training in law enforcement equipment use to ensure it is human rights compliant. Prohibit all training in use of inherently abusive equipment and in abusive techniques of standard law enforcement equipment.
- If no such measures exist, ensure national measures are in accordance with the EU Anti-Torture Regulation, and reflect the recommendations of the 2023 UN Special Rapporteur on torture's *Thematic Study*, so as to effectively address the trade in law enforcement equipment used for torture and other ill-treatment.
- Fully participate in and actively support the international process to develop a Torture-Free Trade Treaty at the United Nations.

NOTES

[1] United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted 10 December 1984, by General Assembly resolution 39/46:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading>.

[2] For the purposes of this briefing, we are including those States that “have been granted candidate status [by the EU], and are currently reforming their national laws to align with EU rules, regulations, and standards”. As of April 2026, this list is:

- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Georgia*
- Moldova
- Montenegro
- North Macedonia
- Serbia
- Türkiye
- Ukraine

For completeness, we also include the one “potential candidate” State, which “has applied to join the EU but has not yet been granted candidate status”:

- Kosovo

For more information on the process of joining the EU, see:

https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-enlargement_en#paragraph_1875

Further resources noted in footnote 22.

*Georgia’s accession negotiations were suspended in November 2024 by the Georgian Government. Georgia is included in this study as it remains an EU candidate country, per the EU.

[3] Activities that could involve a broker include: proposing or arranging transactions for the sale, purchase, or supply of equipment or provision of technical assistance; assisting parties to a transaction to obtain necessary documentation; or selling or buying equipment located in one state for transfer to another state. Definition adapted from the EU Anti-Torture Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2019/125 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 January 2019 concerning trade in certain goods which could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment).

[4] See: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/reports/europe-regional-briefing-on-the-trade-in-law-enforcement-equipment-used-for-torture-and-other-ill-treatment/>

[5] See: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/reports/africa-regional-briefing-on-the-trade-in-law-enforcement-equipment-that-could-be-used-for-torture-and-other-ill-treatment/>

[6] A/78/324: 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. 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78324-thematic-study-global-trade-weapons-eequipment-and-devices-used>.

[7] Annex 1 – Category A Goods: Equipment that is Inherently Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading. Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment A/78/324

[8] Annex 2 – Category B Goods: Equipment that should be controlled. Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment A/78/324

[9] Similar categories are used in: Omega Research Foundation, International Human Rights Clinic Harvard Law School, and Amnesty International. 2022. Essential Elements of a Torture-Free Trade Treaty. Amnesty International Index IOR 40/5977/2022. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/5977/2022/en/>

[10] Learn more: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/what-we-do/electric-shock/>

[11] Council of Europe. Report to the Serbian Government on the visit to Serbia carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 30 March 2023. CPT/Inf (2024) 04. <https://rm.coe.int/1680ae4238>. P3, 8

[12] Council of Europe. Report to the Serbian Government on the visit to Serbia carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 30 March 2023. CPT/Inf (2024) 04. <https://rm.coe.int/1680ae4238>. P10

- [13] Learn more: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/what-we-do/chemical-irritants/>
- [14] Amnesty International Public Statement. 19 June 2025. Türkiye: "I cannot breathe". Allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in the context of mass protests between 19–26 March must be investigated. AI Index Number: EUR 44/9471/2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/9471/2025/en/>
- [15] See: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/what-we-do/projectiles/>
- [16] Letter to the Government of Georgia from Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers. Ref.: AL GEO 1/2025. 20 January 2025. <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=29636>.
- [17] Learn more: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/what-we-do/restraints/>.
- [18] Council of Europe. Visit Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina. Periodic Visit 2–13 September 2024. European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). CPT/Inf (2026) 04. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/48802a64a4>.
- [19] Council of Europe. Visit Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina. Periodic Visit 2–13 September 2024. European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). CPT/Inf (2026) 04. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/48802a64a4>.
- [20] For further information, please contact Omega Research Foundation.
- [21] For more information, contact Omega Research Foundation.
- [22] Read more: European Commission 'Steps towards joining'. Available at: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/steps-towards-joining_en; European Commission 'Conditions for membership'. Available at: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/conditions-membership_en.
- Further detailed information available: European Council in Copenhagen – 21–22 June 1993 – Conclusions of the Presidency. DOC 93/3. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/doc_93_3
- [23] Read the Consolidated Text: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02019R0125-20250820>.
- [24] Read Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2025/928 of 21 May 2025 amending Regulation (EU) 2019/125 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning trade in certain goods which could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202500928.
- [25] Read more: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/news/european-union-significantly-strengthens-region-wide-efforts-to-end-the-torture-trade/>.
- [26] Council of Europe. 2025. CDDH Report on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)2 on measures against the trade in goods used for the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. As adopted by the CDDH at its 102nd meeting Strasbourg, 26 June 2025. Paragraph 13 (Montenegro) and paragraph 14 (North Macedonia).
- [27] Read the Recommendation: https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680a1f4e5.
- [28] OP 23. United Nations General Assembly. A/RES/80/198. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 15 December 2025 on the report of the Third Committee (A/80/545, para. 5) 77/209. Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Note: the word 'technology' was added in 2025.
- [29] See, for example: Omega Research Foundation. 2025. Torture-Free Trade Network. Available at: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/what-we-do/trade/torture-free-trade-network/>.
- [30] United Nations General Assembly. 2025. A/80/137: Trends and developments in the global struggle to end torture – Note by the Secretary-General. 11 July 2025. Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/137>.
- [31] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2024. Press releases: UN experts call for international torture-free trade agreement. 29 April 2024. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-call-international-torture-free-trade-agreement>.

[32] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2023. High Commissioner honours victims of torture. 23 June 2023. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/06/high-commissioner-honours-victims-torture>

[33] Council of Europe Steering Committee for Human Rights. 8 October 2025. Newsroom: Curbing the Death Penalty and Torture Trade: Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Adopts Key Decisions. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-intergovernmental-cooperation/-/curbing-the-death-penalty-and-torture-trade-council-of-europe-committee-of-ministers-adopts-key-decisions%C2%A0>.

[34] See, for example: Omega Research Foundation. 2025. The Shoreditch Declaration for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty. Available at: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/what-we-do/trade/the-shoreditch-declaration-for-a-torture-free-trade-treaty/>.



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Registered Company No. 05224240.

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