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**Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights
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Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation

Note by the Secretary-General*

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution [54/23](#).

* The present document was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.



Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova

Torture in the Russian Federation: a tool for repression at home and aggression abroad

Summary

In the present report, the widespread and systematic use of torture and ill-treatment, committed with impunity in the Russian Federation, is examined. The report highlights the shortcomings in Russian legislation, including the lack of a specific legal framework addressing torture and ill-treatment, the inadequate judicial response, and the systemic issues that enable human rights abuses. The analysis covers enforcement and accountability deficiencies. The report concludes with recommendations for aligning Russian legislation and practices with international human rights standards.

I. Introduction

1. The present report¹ is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 54/23.
2. The report documents how torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are used as State-sanctioned tools for systemic oppression in the Russian Federation. In particular, they are used extensively by law enforcement authorities to stifle dissent and are rife in police custody and administrative detention, including for the purpose of extracting confessions during initial detention. They are infamous features of the Russian penitentiary system.
3. The analysis sheds light on the deficiencies of the Russian legislative framework, which does not adequately criminalize torture and lacks provisions for appropriate accountability, enabling law enforcement and prison authorities to carry out such offences with impunity. It reveals the wide variety of brutal methods used that are designed not just to punish but also to purposefully humiliate and inflict lasting injuries, both psychological and physical, or even death. These methods are used by law enforcement, prison guards or inmates acting under orders and with the complicity of government authorities. Psychological torture in prisons, including by subjecting detainees to prolonged solitary confinement in a punishment isolation cell (SHIZO), or banishment to a psychiatric ward, can lead to death.
4. In the report, the Special Rapporteur explores the link between violence committed by private individuals and State complicity due to the absence of necessary legal protections, including against domestic violence, or effective response mechanisms.
5. Of particular concern, in the current context of the Russian war against Ukraine, is the documented torture of peaceful anti-war activists and of Ukrainians forcibly transferred within Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories or deported to the Russian Federation.

II. Methodology

6. The Special Rapporteur's efforts to establish interaction with the Russian authorities and requests for visits to the country have remained unanswered. Consequently, the present report is based on an extensive review of Russian legislation alongside international human rights treaties and standards binding on the Russian Federation.
7. Reports and analysis were received from human rights organizations, and consultations were held with legal experts, defence lawyers of victims and survivors, human rights defenders, and representatives of Russian non-governmental organizations (NGOs).² Information was received from victims and witnesses, including first-hand testimonies of LGBT³ persons from Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia who were survivors of torture, and from returned Ukrainians following their deportation and detention in the Russian Federation.

¹ Supplemental to A/HRC/57/59.

² The present report is based on an analysis of the information gathered during consultations with sources inside and outside the Russian Federation. The original contributions are on file with the Secretariat.

³ Throughout the present report, the acronym "LGBT" should be read as inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse persons.

8. In the report, complaint handling, investigative practices, oversight mechanisms and the ineffectiveness of current safeguards against torture are considered. The report draws from court documents, official records and statistics, and other relevant material, including from open sources.

9. Due to space limitations, only a few illustrative cases could be included. However, the Special Rapporteur is aware of many more examples showing the serious, widespread and systematic use of torture in the Russian Federation and the ineffective response of the Russian authorities to allegations and complaints.

III. Legal framework

A. Criminalization of torture and the role of the judiciary

10. The Russian legal framework lacks a separate criminal offence of torture.⁴ Acts of torture and ill-treatment are generally prosecuted under lesser offences such as “excess of power” or “exceeding official authority”, under article 286 of the Criminal Code. An annotation to this article in July 2022 introduced a definition of torture,⁵ allowing for prosecution for “excess of authority” involving the use of violence, torture or torture that resulted in death or bodily harm. However, this still does not meet the requirements of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which the Russian Federation is a party.

11. The Government of the Russian Federation is responsible not only for the actions of its agents, such as law enforcement, national security and penitentiary staff, but also for the actions of private actors. Current Russian legislation fails to address acts inflicted not only by public officials but also by “other persons acting in an official capacity”, as required by the Convention against Torture. Government failure to promptly address and investigate all those participating in or enabling such crimes is contrary to international law.

12. Depending on the severity of the act, the penalties imposed by Russian courts for inflicting torture and ill-treatment can be merely fines or a conditional sentence, penalties incommensurate with the gravity of the crime. The Convention against Torture requires that acts of torture must be punishable by a sentence similar to the most serious offences under domestic law.⁶

13. Despite numerous recommendations urging legislative and practical improvements from United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the 2023 universal periodic review of the Russian Federation,⁷ no tangible reforms have followed.

14. Forced confessions are criminalized under article 302 of the Criminal Code, which outlaws the use of threats, force or other coercive methods to compel someone to provide testimony, including confessions, during an investigation or judicial proceedings. However, torture and violence are regularly deployed against suspects,⁸ especially during counter-terrorism operations, to force a confession or admission of complicity, with at least 22 cases documented in 2023.⁹

⁴ CAT/C/RUS/CO/6, para. 9.

⁵ Federal Law No. 307-FZ of 14 July 2022.

⁶ See A/HRC/13/39/Add.5.

⁷ See A/HRC/55/14/Add.1.

⁸ See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/7705/2024/en>.

⁹ Submission received from Russian NGO First Department.

15. In practice, forced confessions are deemed admissible as evidence, and judges and prosecutors fail to investigate promptly and impartially allegations of torture or other ill-treatment. Following the terrorist attack on Moscow's Crocus City Hall in March 2024, the alleged perpetrators appeared in court bearing visible marks of physical torture and one of them was wheeled into the courtroom unconscious.¹⁰ This did not prompt a single question from the presiding judge as to their treatment and/or the possibility of forced confessions.

16. Judges consistently fail to order investigations into the torture of anti-war critics and dissenters. At his court hearing, Artyom Kamardin, arrested in September 2022, looked visibly maltreated with injuries to his face and bloodstains on his clothes.¹¹ He told the court that police had tortured him, forcing him to apologize on video for his anti-war poetry. The police investigator denied any wrongdoing, and the judge refused to order an investigation. Despite a medical assessment certifying his injuries, his torture complaint was dismissed again by the Moscow City Court in January 2024, without any investigation. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.

17. Russian courts also wield significant discretion in determining what constitutes a mitigating circumstance, including for violent crimes.¹² Judges have considered participation in the war against Ukraine as a mitigating factor leading to lesser punishment in 87.5 per cent of criminal cases involving battery and 61 per cent of other cases related to domestic violence.¹³

B. Lack of independent monitoring and reporting mechanisms

18. The creation of public monitoring commissions¹⁴ in 2008 was seen at the time as a positive development to ensure public oversight of human rights conditions in places of detention. The commissions, which exist in all regions of the Russian Federation, were intended to operate independently, but their independence and impartiality have been seriously undermined. Human rights defenders have been deliberately excluded from membership, and a disproportionate number of members with law enforcement backgrounds or affiliated with the authorities have been appointed.¹⁵ In 2022, when the membership of 43 of the 85 commissions was renewed, all independent human rights activists were excluded.

19. The work of the public monitoring commissions has been further compromised by the Constitutional Court decision¹⁶ to uphold the prison administration's power to intervene in the commissions' interviews with inmates if matters other than prison conditions are discussed, for example if detainees mention force being used against them during their arrest. Mandatory advance 48-hour notification is now required for commission visits.

20. No mechanisms exist in the Russian Federation to protect individuals who report torture. A complaint brought by a torture victim can be treated as an attempt to falsely

¹⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-experts-condemn-terrorist-attack-russian-concert-hall>.

¹¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/russia-un-expert-calls-poets-jailed-free-speech-clampdown-be-freed>.

¹² The list of mitigating circumstances provided in article 61 of the Criminal Code is deliberately non-exhaustive.

¹³ See <https://verstka.media/nasilie-nad-zhenschinami-obhoditsia-uchastnikam-boevyh-deystviy-v-5-t-r-issledovanie>.

¹⁴ Federal Law No. 76-FZ of 10 June 2008.

¹⁵ See <https://www.severreal.org/a/po-suti-eto-konets-chlenov-onk-hotyat-zastavit-preduprezhdad-ovizitah/32350503.html>.

¹⁶ Constitutional Court decisions Nos. 2167-O and 2168-O of 26 October 2021.

accuse law enforcement officials of a crime, opening the victim to retaliatory punishment and criminal charges that require a low standard of proof and regularly result in conviction. This can force victims to recant their complaints, thus concealing the actual prevalence of torture in the country.

21. Witnesses in criminal cases can come under torture themselves. Marina Ruzaeva was asked by police to help to identify a criminal suspect. Instead, at the police station, she was beaten, subjected to electric shocks and interrogated for several hours. She filed a complaint, and three policemen were convicted. However, facing threats during the five years that it took for the case to be prosecuted, she and her family were forced to relocate.

C. Accountability and justice

22. The lack of effective investigations and judicial remedies fails to ensure redress and justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators.¹⁷ Before a criminal case is opened, a pre-investigation inquiry is required. These inquiries are undertaken by branches of the Investigative Committee, the federal governmental body responsible for investigating crimes. Often, these pre-investigations do not result in criminal cases, even when there is credible evidence of torture. Appeals can be made but often incur lengthy procedural delays or result in unwarranted dismissals.

23. Human rights defenders analysed 267 cases of torture and ill-treatment from 2000 to 2023.¹⁸ In 79 per cent of those cases, the pre-investigation inquiry concluded with a decision not to open a criminal case. In only 21 per cent were criminal cases opened, often when the victim died or sustained grievous injuries or there were multiple victims. Before initiating a criminal case based on credible allegations of torture and ill-treatment, investigators on average issued 6 refusals, and in some instances 20 refusals, concerning the same case. Usually, it fell on the victim to challenge these refusals. In 41 per cent of the cases that went to trial, the perpetrators of torture and ill-treatment merely received a conditional sentence.

24. In February 2020, Vyacheslav Petrosyan was punched in the head, kicked and subjected to electric shocks in pretrial detention. Despite multiple rulings refusing to initiate criminal proceedings, a case was eventually opened under charges of “excess of power with the use of violence”. There were repeated delays, with the investigation suspended and the case terminated multiple times. Finally, in October 2022, following complaints by human rights defenders to the prosecutor’s office, the case was reopened. However, it has not yet gone to trial, and no one has been held accountable.

25. According to official data, in 2023 eight people were found guilty on “excess of power” charges for in fact committing torture resulting in the death of a victim. None were convicted on charges related to the extraction of a confession through torture, despite this being the most common purpose for using torture.¹⁹ Sentences ranged from three and a half years’ conditional sentence to five years in a maximum-security prison.²⁰ Even when perpetrators of torture are convicted, courts regularly commute or overturn the sentence on appeal.

¹⁷ CAT/C/RUS/CO/6, paras. 14 and 15.

¹⁸ See https://pytkam.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/arifmetika_pytok_onlajn_versiya_01_09.pdf.

¹⁹ See <http://www.cdep.ru/index.php?id=79&item=8690>. Access from outside the Russian Federation to this website requires the use of a virtual private network (VPN).

²⁰ See <https://meduza.io/feature/2024/03/26/vlasti-publichno-odobrili-pytiki-obvinyayemyh-po-delu-o-terakte-v-krokuse>.

IV. Torture and ill-treatment in detention

26. There is widespread use of torture and other human rights violations within detention facilities in the Russian Federation, including in police custody, pretrial detention centres, penitentiary institutions, migration detention centres, medical facilities and military bases, under the responsibility of a range of federal ministries and services.

27. The Russian human rights group Gulagu.net announced in October 2021 that it had received over 40 GB of video evidence documenting beatings, torture and rape of inmates at a prison hospital used as a torture facility, the psychiatric ward of the Saratov Regional Tuberculosis Hospital No. 1. It showed prisoners being restrained and subjected to brutal assaults and rape with objects by fellow prisoners while prison officials watched. Subsequently, more than a hundred photos and videos were released.

28. Torture in the penitentiary system and by law enforcement and the Federal Security Service was acknowledged as an ongoing issue during the meeting in December 2023 of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, a consultative body to the President. In January 2024, the President instructed the Investigative Committee to take measures to enhance the effectiveness of investigations into torture of prisoners and to report by 1 July 2024.²¹ The report has not yet been delivered.

A. Torture methods

29. There is a wide range of torture methods employed across the detention facilities in the Russian Federation, so well known and widespread that each has acquired its own name, a seemingly innocent word but one that brings horror to anyone who has survived imprisonment in the Russian Federation. The following are only some of these torture methods, designed to inflict severe pain, both physical and psychological:

(a) “Reception” (*priyomka*): brutal beatings and humiliation used as “reception” procedures against newly arrived prisoners at a detention facility; “call to a friend” or “call to Putin”: electric shocks inflicted to sensitive parts of a victim’s body, such as genitals, sometimes by using a modified field military telephone (TA-57) known as *tapik*; waterboarding (*utoplennik*/“drowned man” or *vodolaz*/“diver”): near drowning done by holding the victim’s head underwater in a bucket or toilet;

(b) “Swallow” (*lastochka*) or “envelope” (*konvert*): suspending the victim from the ceiling by the limbs, bound together behind the back, for a prolonged period; crucifixion: handcuffing or tying the victim’s arms and legs in an extended outstretched position for lengthy periods; mock executions (*rasstrel*): forcing victims to kneel, blindfolded or with a plastic bag over their head and firing several shots from a pistol or machine gun at close range; in addition to the prisoners’ shock at the thought that they are to be executed, the sound of the shots is deafening;

(c) “Little elephant” (*slonik*): detainees are repeatedly subjected to short periods of near asphyxiation by placing a gas mask over their head and blocking the air valve or by placing a plastic bag over the victims’ head, tied around the neck to prevent breathing, known as “bag” (*paket*), “shop” (*magazin*) or “supermarket” (*supermarket*). Pulling out the victim’s fingernails and/or toenails is a method used particularly in the Russian penitentiary system and in police custody in Chechnya;

²¹ See <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/73277>.

(d) “Press cells” (*press khata*): special torture cells used where other prisoners are coerced into torturing the victim. Other cell punishment includes the “music box” (*muzikalnaya shkatulka*), subjecting victims to prolonged or continuous sleep deprivation by playing loud music into their cell;

(e) Torture methods used in the Russian army include the “stove” (*pechka*), confining soldiers without food or water in a metal container outside, both in extreme heat and in freezing temperatures known as “refrigerator” (*kholodilnik*), or putting the victim in a hole in the ground covered with a metal grille, called a “torture pit” (*zindan*);

(f) “Black Grisha” (*chorny Grisha*): rape using a foreign object, such as a rubber baton or improvised tools such as a mop handle or bottle. Methods used mostly in Russian penitentiary institutions include “prevention” (*profilaktika*), repeatedly beating victims with rubber batons on the heels of the feet or lower tendons;

(g) “Cigarette burns” or “cauterization” (*prizhiganie*): victims are burned with lighters, irons, soldering irons or kettles of boiling water; Russian federal forces used this method during the 1999–2009 armed conflict in Chechnya to torture Chechen detainees, in addition to beatings and gang rapes of Chechen women in custody; “tea drinking” (*popit chai*): boiling water is poured into the victim’s mouth, causing internal burns; “to heal” (*podlechit*): a healthy prisoner is forced to share the same cell with ill prisoners who are infectious; “education” (*obuchenie*): the victim is hit repeatedly with thick books such as dictionaries or encyclopedias.

30. Prolonged solitary confinement, forced psychiatric treatment, the denial of needed medical care and other ill-treatment are also inflicted on detainees.

31. All of these abhorrent practices are well known and widespread in the Russian Federation, clearly indicative of the broader culture of violence where physical and psychological torture and other ill-treatment have become institutionalized, systemic and indeed a norm in places of detention across the country.

B. Police custody

32. Torture and ill-treatment are used by law enforcement, including federal security officers and police, to elicit incriminating evidence from suspects during their initial apprehension.

33. Arbitrary arrests and detentions of peaceful protesters in 2023 and 2024 were accompanied by disproportionate and excessive use of force by police and the use of torture and ill-treatment of protesters held at police stations.²² Peaceful protests in Bashkortostan in January 2024 were violently quashed by police,²³ which resulted in several protesters being hospitalized with severe injuries and at least one dead in police custody. While in pretrial detention for his participation in the protest, Dim Davletkildin was severely beaten, fracturing his spine. Activist Zaki Ilyasov fell into a two-day coma after being beaten during his arrest. Rifat Dautov died in police custody; the circumstances of his death remain unknown, as the Investigative Committee has not released the results of its investigation.²⁴ Miniyar Baiguskarov

²² See <https://memopzk.org/analytics/politzaklyuchyonnye-i-politicheskie-repressii-v-rossii-v-2022-godu/#>, <https://memopzk.org/analytics/politzaklyuchyonnye-i-politicheskie-repressii-v-rossii-v-2023-godu/> and <https://data.ovd.info/dannye-po-zaderzhaniyam-na-publichnykh-akciyakh-za-2011-2023>.

²³ See <https://en.ovdinfo.org/baymak>.

²⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfqMDNcPtZM>.

committed suicide after being tortured to extract information from him,²⁵ and there has been no investigation into his death to bring those responsible to justice.

34. Krasnodar police officers twice detained Ilya Afrosin in June 2021, beating him to force him to write a confession to the theft of a bicycle. A few hours after his release, he died of a ruptured spleen. The NGO Crew against Torture conducted an investigation, which resulted in a criminal case being eventually opened against several police officers. Their trial is ongoing.

35. Rape as a form of torture in police custody in the Russian Federation has been reported in multiple cases. Instances include sexual violence perpetrated by law enforcement against anti-war activists to intimidate, punish and extract forced “apologies” and confessions. The threat of rape against women, coupled with violence and humiliation, is also common. In Chechnya, rape is used against LGBT men in police custody to extract information about other LGBT people.

Administrative detention

36. Administrative sentencing is often the beginning of a so-called “carousel”: a series of arbitrary detentions until a fabricated criminal charge is raised against the victim. Frequently, this is achieved through the use of torture or other coercive practices to obtain a “confession”. Common pretexts for a first administrative arrest include article 20.1 (petty hooliganism) and article 19.3 (disobeying a police officer) of the Code of Administrative Offences. Court hearings for these charges typically last less than 10 minutes and result in up to 15 days of administrative detention.

37. Anti-war activist Anatoly Berezikov died while in administrative detention in 2023 after being tortured to extract a “confession”. His lawyer, Irina Gak, was forced to flee the country with her family because of the extreme danger she faced due to her possession of photos proving he had been tortured.

38. Danil Efimov was detained by the Federal Security Service in December 2023 after it forcibly opened his mobile phone and found several financial transfers to a Ukrainian charity. He was sentenced to 13 days of administrative detention for “using obscene language”. He was then sentenced to another 10 days of detention for “hooliganism”. A few days after again being released, he was taken to an office at the police station where he was beaten by several masked men who threatened to take him to the forest and kill him if he did not sign a confession. In January 2024, he was charged with “treason” for transferring money to the Ukrainian charity, and in July 2024, he was sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment.²⁶

Federal Security Service

39. The Federal Security Service also engages in torture. For example, armed officers from the Service tortured anti-war activist Denis Okhryamkin for several hours in his home to extract a “confession” about his alleged participation in a terrorist activity in 2023. They beat him and threatened to strangle him, to cut off his fingers and to rape him with dumbbells, recalling aloud the details of a recent rape by the police of another anti-war activist. Later they took him to a police station and released him, stating that he should say that he had been detained by mistake in connection with “fraud by Ukrainians with credit cards”. He filed a complaint, but no investigation took place. He fled the Russian Federation fearing for his life.

²⁵ See <https://theins.ru/en/society/275059>.

²⁶ See <https://dept.one/story/danil-efimov/>.

C. Penitentiary system

Pretrial detention

40. The use of torture and ill-treatment is widespread in pretrial detention facilities (SIZO) under the responsibility of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation. Arseny Turbin, a 15-year-old, was sentenced in June 2024 to five years' imprisonment on "terrorism" charges for distributing leaflets criticizing the President of the Russian Federation. He has been tortured and threatened with rape while in SIZO-5 in Moscow, awaiting the appeal in his case.

41. There are also reports of medical care being denied, incidents leading to suicide and suspicious deaths. In April 2023, 30-year-old Sergey Bershatsky and 28-year-old Viktor Samsonov were found dead, 11 days apart, in the cells of SIZO-1 in Orenburg. Other detainees said that, just before his suicide, the latter had been subjected to torture by other prisoners under coercion from the authorities. The Investigative Committee opened two separate criminal cases under "incitement to suicide" and "negligence", failing to investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment in custody. Both cases were closed later in 2023 with no crimes having been found.²⁷

Solitary confinement, punishment cells and special regimes in penal colonies

42. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) prohibit torture and require that the prison system not aggravate the suffering inherent to imprisonment. The disregard for this in the Russian Federation is most evident in the administration of punishments in prisons where inmates are subjected to prolonged periods of solitary confinement amounting to torture,²⁸ often with food and sleep deprivation. Russian law limits a punishment cell term to 15 days, but prison officials may and indeed commonly do bypass this restriction by adding a new term upon an inmate's release, citing new violations. This is contrary to rules 43 and 44 of the Nelson Mandela Rules, which prohibit prolonged solitary confinement.

43. The Penalties Enforcement Code²⁹ of the Russian Federation establishes that transfer to solitary confinement in SHIZO, or cell-type confinement (PKT) with two to five other inmates, should be a "last-resort punitive measure applicable to prisoners who have deliberately violated prison rules", but it does not provide for any judicial review. In practice, disciplinary measures are applied arbitrarily for the slightest violations, such as addressing a prison officer incorrectly.

44. Detention in SHIZO is used in particular against political prisoners and people accused of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, including Crimean Tatars. Teymur Abdullaev, sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment, has spent over two years in SHIZO out of the three and a half years he has spent in prison so far, as at late 2023.

45. Placement in a suicide or self-harm watch regime is used not only for genuine concerns about an individual's safety but also as a form of torture and ill-treatment. The prisoner is subjected to heightened surveillance in a bare cell and has restricted access to communication with the outside world. These practices often lead to deteriorating physical and mental health of the detainees.

²⁷ See <https://www.mk.ru/social/2024/07/15/zagadki-samoubiystv-v-orenburgskom-sizo-pod-prismotrom-500-kamer.html>.

²⁸ See A/66/268.

²⁹ Available at https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_12940/.

Abuse of psychiatry

46. Proper criminal investigations can be bypassed by referring arrested individuals for psychiatric examination and to specialized psychiatric hospitals or wards for involuntary treatment,³⁰ during which severe human rights violations are perpetrated by staff against detainees viewed as “troublemakers”. In recent years, the number of individuals sentenced to compulsory psychiatric treatment for political offences has increased.³¹

47. The lack of independent psychiatric reviews, due to the State’s monopoly on forensic psychiatry, was highlighted as a significant concern in the 2023 report of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Russian Federation.

48. Punitive psychiatry, including the misuse of psychiatric diagnoses, treatments and institutions to punish, control or repress individuals for reasons unrelated to mental health issues,³² is used against activists, journalists, government critics and those who oppose the war against Ukraine. Olga Kuzmina, an environmental activist, was forcibly hospitalized after protesting against urban development projects. Evgenia Elizareva faced psychiatric examination for her activism against waste management issues. Dmitry Nadein, a blogger, was subjected to compulsory psychological treatment for allegedly justifying terrorism. Shaman Alexander Gabyshev endured intensive psychiatric treatment for political dissent. Olga Suvorova was placed in a psychiatric hospital for her participation in civic activities, which the court deemed to be a “deviation from the lifestyle of an ordinary person”.³³ Maxim Lypkan was subjected to psychiatric treatment for posting “fake news” about the military. During his trial, human rights activist Oleg Orlov was recommended for psychiatric examination, purportedly due to his insanity based on his “expressed political and philosophical beliefs”.

49. On 5 September 2024, Alexei Sokolov, who for 20 years has worked to expose the torture of prisoners in Sverdlovsk region, was sent for one month of compulsory psychiatric examination.³⁴ He was arrested in July 2024, beaten by the police, and threatened with sexual violence while in pretrial detention. He is accused of spreading “extremist” material because his organization’s website had on it a Facebook logo, considered an “extremist symbol” in the Russian Federation.

50. Prisoners can be confined in psychiatric wards as a form of punishment for complaining about prison conditions or treatment by prison staff. Reports of torture in these wards include physical and sexual violence, rape, forced administration of heavy doses of medications, and threats by other inmates under orders by prison administration.³⁵

51. At least 21 people died in the psychiatric ward of the Interregional Tuberculosis Hospital No. 19 in Rostov-on-Don in 2020. In January 2024, several employees of the hospital were convicted of torturing 43 people, 3 of whom died. The torture included the use of severe forms of physical restraint, such as prolonged tying to the beds, and overmedication as a form of chemical restraint. Roman Mikhailov was

³⁰ See <https://rm.coe.int/168097e387>.

³¹ See <https://meduza.io/cards/za-poslednee-vremya-figurantov-srazu-neskolkih-politicheskikh-del-podvergli-karatnoy-psihiatrui-iz-za-chego-obvinyamogo-mogut-napravit-na-prinuditelnoe-lechenie>.

³² Ed Holt, “Warnings over misuse of psychiatry in Russia”, *The Lancet*, vol. 403, No. 10438 (4–10 May 2024).

³³ See <https://www.sibreal.org/a/storonnitsu-duntsovoy-zaderzhali-u-vracha-v-krasnoyarske/32949597.html>.

³⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/russia-must-free-human-rights-defender-alexey-sokolov-arrested-posting>.

³⁵ See <https://theins.ru/en/society/257153>.

bound to a bed with restraints for 71 days without being released, even for basic needs, such as toilet use or eating. He died as a result. He had been arrested in January 2020 and transferred to the hospital's psychiatric ward as punishment for confronting the leadership of the Federal Penitentiary Service over corruption issues that he had uncovered.

52. The number of deaths in the eight hospitals used for psychiatric detention remains unknown due to the refusal of the Federal Service for Surveillance in Healthcare to disclose it.

Rape and sexual violence

53. The use of sexual violence within the Russian prison system is a pervasive, acute and long-standing problem, dating back to at least Soviet times.

54. A horrifying example is the aftermath of a mass riot and fire that took place at the penal colony No. 15 in Angarsk in April 2020. The full details of why it occurred remain unclear due to the lack of transparency on the part of the Federal Penitentiary Service. What is known is that suppression of the riot and subsequent punishment of the prisoners was excessively violent. Several hundred prisoners from the penal colony, many in their underwear or entirely naked, were transferred to other prisons, where they were subjected to torture, including sexual violence, inflicted by other prisoners under coercion from the administration in order to extract testimonies to support the official narrative of the cause and handling of the riot and fire.³⁶ Many were raped using broom handles or other items in front of prison authorities who watched and shouted obscenities encouraging the torture. In a particularly violent case, Kezhik Ondar had a heating element inserted into his rectum and then switched on. He survived but was left with a disability. Descriptions of the torture were detailed in an anonymous interview with a victim provided to *Novaya Gazeta*.³⁷

55. The public revelations about the mass torture prompted an investigation in 2021. Fearing the stigma of being relegated to a "lower caste" – a status imposed on victims of sexual violence in men's prisons in the Russian Federation – many individuals did not testify to their abuse. Lawyers and human rights activists working on the case estimate the number of victims to be between 200³⁸ and 300.³⁹

56. Thirty-five inmates were recognized by the courts as victims of rape, but several dozen others were not recognized as victims, despite medical examinations supporting their claims.⁴⁰ The Federal Penitentiary Service officers responsible were not charged with complicity in torture but instead were charged with "excessive use of power" by transferring prisoners to cells where they were raped.⁴¹ Five prison employees were convicted for exceeding their official authority, but their convictions were overturned on appeal in April 2024.⁴² The investigation into the riot's aftermath is ongoing.

57. Meanwhile, victims and witnesses who remain in prison continue to face pressure from Federal Penitentiary Service officers to retract their testimonies. In January 2024, Takhirzhon Bakiev wrote a letter from prison reporting that staff of the Service were pressuring him to retract his testimony. The letter concluded with the

³⁶ See <https://amp.meduza.io/amp/feature/2021/10/26/dobro-na-vse-krome-trupov>.

³⁷ See <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/10/11/razrabotchiki-18>.

³⁸ See <https://www.mk.ru/social/2022/08/01/delo-o-pytках-v-irkutskikh-sizo-poluchilo-novyy-povorot-polovina-zamuchennykh-ispugas.html>.

³⁹ According to lawyer Karinna Moskalenko.

⁴⁰ Submission received from All-Russia Movement for Human Rights, headed by Lev Ponomarev.

⁴¹ See <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/cv2ln1ry5xdo>.

⁴² See <https://www.sibreal.org/a/sud-otmenil-prigovor-irkutskim-sotrudnikam-fsin-priznannyh-vinovnymi-v-iznasilovanii-zaklyuchennogo/32916938.html>.

words: “Please help, I can’t manage on my own anymore. I don’t want to die here labelled as a suicide.” A month later, Bakiev was found hanging in his cell. The official investigation said that it was suicide.⁴³

V. Targeted groups

A. Political prisoners

58. Torture is used as a method of punishment and intimidation against political prisoners and anti-war activists. Since his detention in January 2021 until his death in custody three years later, Alexei Navalny spent a total of 295 days in SHIZO solitary confinement. Two days before his death, Navalny was sentenced to another term in SHIZO, which would have been his twenty-seventh. He faced constant torture and ill-treatment, including the denial of adequate medical care. Two months before his death, his whereabouts were concealed for over 20 days when he was transferred from a prison in Moscow to a prison above the Arctic Circle. This multiple-stage prison transfer process, called *etap*, is always carried out in secrecy and may take weeks or even months, during which time relatives and lawyers are denied information about the whereabouts and fate of the prisoners, putting them at heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment.

59. Other prominent political prisoners, including Alexei Gorinov and Vladimir Kara-Murza, have also been subjected to lengthy SHIZO punishment and incommunicado detention amounting to torture and ill-treatment.⁴⁴ The latter spent 11 months in solitary confinement before he and 15 other political prisoners convicted in sham trials were released from the Russian Federation in a prisoner exchange in August 2024. However, over 1,300 more prisoners remain arbitrarily detained on politically motivated charges.

60. At least 127 of these political prisoners are suffering from illnesses but lack adequate medical attention. Evgeny Bestuzhev faces a life-threatening condition requiring surgery, which as at September 2024 had not been provided. The harsh detention conditions and denial of access to medical treatment in detention have an irreversible negative impact on prisoners’ physical and mental health.

Political prisoners in Chechnya

61. For years, Russian authorities have failed to address human rights abuses, including the use of torture and ill-treatment, by the Chechen authorities. This is a legacy of the grave human rights violations and war crimes committed by Russian authorities during the 10 years of armed conflict in Chechnya from 1999 to 2009.

62. Chechen police and military conducted two “counter-terrorism operations” in January 2017, detaining and torturing some 200 people alleged to be “extremist”. According to an investigation by *Novaya Gazeta*, 27 men were then extrajudicially executed during one night upon the command of police colonel Aslan Irashkanov.

63. In March 2024, the Special Rapporteur met with a former Chechen police officer who was serving in the special forces during that period in 2017 and witnessed some of the atrocities. He explained: “We were ordered to round up people. To go to different places and go house to house to find 56 targeted people. We were not told

⁴³ See <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/02/06/v-irkutskoi-ik-naiden-poveshennym-takhirzhon-bakiev-on-byi-odnim-iz-poterpevsikh-po-delu-o-pytках-posle-bunta-v-angarskoi-ik-15-news>.

⁴⁴ See e.g. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/12/russia-pattern-enforced-disappearances-imprisoned-dissident-voices-must-end>.

what the charges were.”⁴⁵ He said that the arrested people had been held in a basement at the Grozny police station and considered dissidents of the Chechen regime. “When I was on duty, I saw detainees being tortured. Thirteen were executed. A rope was used to strangle them one by one. They didn’t know it was going to happen. The dead body was removed before the next victim was brought into the room. They were made to kneel with their hands handcuffed behind their back. They were all killed in one night. In the room next door, police were playing ping-pong. The people who did the killings were not from special forces but were security guards or bodyguards who worked for a high-level official.” He said that other prisoners had been kept with no charges and tortured by beatings, electrocution or being hung from hooks and dunked in barrels of water until they passed out. “They were trying to get complicit names”, he explained.

64. A special commission of inquiry for the North Caucasus began an investigation into torture and summary executions but abruptly terminated it in April 2017, citing a lack of credible evidence. The commission was disbanded in 2017. No one has been held accountable for these crimes.

65. This pattern of human rights violations and impunity continues in Chechnya today, with State-sanctioned violence, incommunicado detention in unofficial sites, enforced disappearances, torture and killing in police custody.⁴⁶ Repressive measures are also undertaken against family members, as collective punishment against critics of the Chechen regime.

66. In July 2023, Zarema Musaeva, the mother of a prominent Chechen human rights lawyer and activist, Abubakar Yangulbaev, was sentenced to five and a half years’ imprisonment by a court in Grozny as punishment for her son’s vocal criticism of the Chechen President, Ramzan Kadyrov. Her health is deteriorating because she is denied adequate medical care. In its May 2024 judgment on her case, the European Court of Human Rights found that she suffered inhuman and degrading treatment.

B. Conscientious objectors and mobilized men

67. Since the start of partial mobilization in September 2022, torture and ill-treatment have been used by Russian army commanders against conscientious objectors, mobilized men and regular servicemen who refuse to obey orders to fight against Ukraine. At least 15 unofficial places of detention exist close to the front line where hundreds are kept and subjected to torture to punish them.

68. Vladimir Frolov, a guitar music teacher with a disability, was kept in an abandoned coal mine and subjected to beatings, death threats and threats to cut off his fingers when he refused to fight. He was wounded and hospitalized but was then abducted by his army commanders and sent again to fight, despite being on crutches and unable to use his injured leg. The army officers told him that he would be used as “cannon fodder”. They apparently kept their word: on 15 April 2024, his family learned of his death.

69. Indigenous Peoples and members of ethnic minorities are disproportionately targeted for mobilization and subjected to torture and ill-treatment if they refuse. A group of 28 Indigenous men who refused to go back to war after being wounded and treated were detained in May 2024, placed in the pretrial detention facility in Yakutsk and subjected to torture. Two Indigenous brothers, Gennady and Semyon Kiskorov, conscientious objectors, were beaten for refusing to return to the front lines after

⁴⁵ His testimony, in Russian, was interpreted simultaneously into English, and only excerpts are used here due to space limitations.

⁴⁶ See <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-chechnya-prison-kadyrov/32246562.html>.

recovering from being wounded. The former was tied to a tree overnight and deprived of food and water for two days.

C. Women and girls

70. Russian authorities have an obligation to address and prevent crimes of torture and ill-treatment. This entails an obligation to legislate against and criminalize all forms of violence, including gender-based violence against women and girls, such as domestic violence, forced marriage, sexual violence, female genital mutilation, violence in the name of “honour” and “honour killings”.

71. The Russian Federation lacks a dedicated law criminalizing gender-based violence, and legal protections for women and girls are also lacking. There is no legal definition of domestic violence or a comprehensive system designed to address victims’ needs. In 2021, the European Court of Human Rights noted the structural and systemic dysfunction of the Russian legal system in cases of domestic violence.⁴⁷

72. First-time, non-aggravated battery against family or household members was decriminalized and made an administrative offence in 2017, with significantly reduced penalties commensurate to a parking fine. This indicated that the Government no longer viewed domestic abuse as a serious crime, normalizing violence as part of “traditional values”.

73. Many cases of domestic abuse are treated as “private prosecution” cases, requiring the victim to independently collect medical evidence, draft and file a lawsuit, and then bring the case to court without any support from the police or prosecutor. For victims of sexual crimes, the experience of seeking justice can be retraumatizing: survivors are required to repeat their statements at every stage of the process, multiple times, and confront the perpetrator directly at the trial, or else risk having the proceedings terminated.

74. The Criminal Code contains a narrow definition of rape and other sexual crimes, requiring coercion and the use or threat of violence or abuse of the “victim’s state of helplessness”. There is no explicit recognition of rape in marriage.

75. The lack of a victim protection system exposes victims to further abuse, since the accused is often the husband or intimate partner with whom the victim resides. There is no provision for restraining orders, and shelters and victim support services are lacking, particularly in rural and remote areas.

76. A June 2023 law⁴⁸ and subsequent March and October 2024 amendments⁴⁹ allow accused or convicted criminals to be released from criminal liability if they join the Russian army. These provisions apply to all offences except for sexual offences against minors, terrorism, or crimes against the constitutional order and State security. The situation of survivors and victims is not mentioned, and their interests are not protected. Already this is having a negative impact on women victims of violence.

77. Ivan Rossomakhin, sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment for murder in 2020, was released after joining the Wagner Group in the war against Ukraine. Back in his village, he raped and killed an 85-year-old woman, which led to a new 23-year sentence. Just eight days later, in August 2024, he was freed by signing up again for the war.

⁴⁷ See <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=001-213869>.

⁴⁸ Federal Law No. 270-FZ of 24 June 2023.

⁴⁹ Federal Law No. 64-FZ of 23 March 2024 and Federal Law No. 340-FZ of 2 October 2024.

78. Violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, in the North Caucasus region is a significant human rights issue, deeply intertwined with the region's patriarchal traditions and persistent impunity that exacerbate the problem.

79. "Honour killings", whereby women are killed by male relatives to "restore family honour", usually with impunity, are an ongoing concern. Between 2008 and 2017, in 39 cases reported by civil society organizations in the North Caucasus region, perpetrators received lenient sentences or acquittals based on the supposed "immorality" of the victim's behaviour. Recent statistics are lacking, a result of their unavailability. Often, law enforcement officials were complicit or acquiescent in these crimes. The lack of legal protection and support services for women in the region forces many to flee as the only means of escape from violence.

80. Female genital mutilation is not outlawed and is practised on girls, primarily at home and in Dagestan,⁵⁰ with over 1,000 girls potentially becoming victims each year in Dagestan alone. Some commercial medical clinics in Ingushetia and Moscow publicly offered these procedures without any fear of repercussion.

D. LGBT persons

81. The responsibility of the Russian authorities to address and prevent torture also extends to any private places where individuals may be confined and thereby deprived of liberty.⁵¹ This includes "rehabilitation centres" where individuals are subjected to so-called "conversion therapy".

82. "Conversion therapy" procedures inflict severe physical and/or mental pain and suffering which amount to torture. A 2021 report by the Moscow Community Center for LGBT+ Initiatives showed that, for 82 per cent of victims, the "therapy" started when they were children, and it subjected them to violence, including acts of physical and psychological abuse, forced medication, isolation and confinement.

83. People sent to private "conversion therapy" centres have described being held against their will and subjected to harmful punishment as "treatment". Ada Blakewell, a 23-year-old transgender non-binary person, was held for nine months, beaten, thrown into a nearby river and administered neuroleptic drugs intended for persons with psychiatric illnesses. Alexandra, a 28-year-old transgender woman, was forcibly held for 21 months while heavily sedated. She was repeatedly told that she was sick, and other residents threatened to kill her. Elina Ukhmanova, a bisexual 18-year-old, was kept for four months, subjected to violence, handcuffed to handrails and left to hang suspended for long periods. After her release in 2022, she requested that the police investigate her unlawful imprisonment in the "rehabilitation centre" and its unauthorized "medical" practices. Her request was dismissed.

84. Police and security forces in Chechnya are known to abduct, blackmail and torture LGBT men. Victims are unlikely to file complaints due to fears of further reprisals on themselves or their families and knowing that it would be unlikely that their case would be investigated because law enforcement agencies in Chechnya do not investigate allegations of torture, kidnapping, "honour killings" or "conversion" practices. In 2022, the NGO North Caucasus SOS Crisis Group filed 3 crime reports and 20 appeals to law enforcement agencies concerning incidents of police and family

⁵⁰ See https://web.archive.org/web/20220124092434/https://www.srji.org/about/annual/strategii-protivodeystviya-FGM-proizvodstvo_kalechashchikh_operatsiy_srji/.

⁵¹ See general comment No. 1 (2024) on the definition and scope of places of deprivation of liberty of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

violence against LGBT people. No investigations were undertaken, and no criminal cases were opened.

85. The Special Rapporteur collected a number of first-hand accounts from victims of LGBT persecution by Chechen police and security forces, often with the involvement of local authorities. The victims have all had to flee the Russian Federation due to concerns about their safety. Their testimonies consistently documented that they had been held incommunicado without any charges in secret detention places, including in the Chechen villages of Argun and Tsotsi-Yurt, where they had been tortured to get information about other LGBT people. Methods of torture included electric shocks, beatings with pipes and batons and waterboarding, as well as rape and sexual violence. Some testified that they had been forced to beat or administer electric shocks to other prisoners. No one received medical attention for their injuries while being detained. If they were released – often in return for bribes – family members were told that they should kill them to “clear their name” and that they would not be punished.

E. Foreigners, migrants and asylum-seekers

86. Tajiks were accused of carrying out the terrorist attack in Moscow in 2024 that killed 145 people, for which Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan claimed responsibility. Since then, the authorities have doubled down on police raids, detentions, ill-treatment, extortions, harassment and deportations of migrants, particularly Tajiks and others from Central Asia. Nationalist vigilante groups have been given a free hand to attack migrants with the acquiescence and complicity of the authorities.

87. Racial profiling is used to identify migrants and non-Slavic-looking Russian nationals, to then coerce or lure them into signing military contracts to fight in the war. Police, sometimes heavily armed, have raided places of residence, workplaces and mosques and detained people in overcrowded police buses or police stations for hours and even days, without access to water, food or toilets.

88. According to the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, around 11,000 persons were placed in migration detention centres in 2023, and almost 7,000 in the first quarter of 2024. Reports of systemic human rights violations of these detainees include the use of electric shocks and severe beatings. Detainees are often held in prison-like cells in overcrowded conditions with rudimentary sanitation. Lawyers have been denied access to their clients being held there.

89. Until January 2024, when a three-month limit was imposed, foreigners and stateless persons without documentation or nationality could be held in detention indefinitely. Some have been recruited into the army by promises of high wages and simplified naturalization.

90. Since 2022, at least 10 cases have been documented of Russian authorities returning asylum-seekers to their country of origin, despite their refoulement having been prohibited by the European Court of Human Rights, due to the risk of torture or to their lives.

F. Ukrainians

91. Since 2014, when the Russian Federation annexed Crimea, an unknown number of Ukrainians have been detained by Russian authorities and forcibly transferred to detention facilities in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine or deported to

prisons in the Russian Federation.⁵² The exact number is unknown because the Russian authorities do not provide this information. As at 2 August 2024, at least 1,672 civilians were known to be arbitrarily detained, including opinion leaders, bloggers, journalists, activists, teachers, officials in local administrations, humanitarian aid volunteers, medical workers and pensioners. They are held in 186 locations in the Russian-occupied territories, in the Russian Federation and in Belarus.

92. Some 3,665 Ukrainian soldiers and 164 civilians have been returned to Ukraine during prisoner-of-war exchanges. Upon return, they have consistently reported torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence and abuse by Russian authorities. Torture during interrogations was employed to extract testimonies about other civilians who opposed the Russian army, to obtain self-incriminating confessions or to punish those perceived as opposing the Russian army, supporting Ukraine or providing information to the Ukrainian armed forces. They testified to the use of electric shocks, including the method known as “call to Putin”, mock executions, waterboarding, and shooting of the hands and legs, among other abuses.

93. Viktoria Andrusha, a 26-year-old Ukrainian mathematics teacher, was detained by Russian forces and held incommunicado for six months. She was repeatedly tortured, including with electric shocks, beatings and threats of rape and sexual violence, with the aim of extracting a forced confession about providing information to the Ukrainian army. Before her release from SIZO-1 in Kursk, she was told by the Russian authorities that no incriminating evidence had been found.

94. During their multiple transfers between detention facilities and especially upon arrival in a new place, Ukrainian citizens reported being subjected to torture and ill-treatment at the hands of the guards, including undressing to underwear, beatings with batons and metal bars, and administering electric shocks, including to their genitals, until they were no longer able to stand, in a so-called “reception” procedure.

95. Ivan Drozd and Vladyslav Dobrovolsky were detained in Kyiv region during Russian occupation in early 2022. Witnesses report that both men were held in refrigerator chambers at Hostomel airport, tortured and subjected to mock executions before deportation to the Russian Federation via Belarus.

96. As at 2 August 2024, at least 655 Ukrainians held by Russian authorities had criminal cases opened against them, including 475 combatants and 180 civilians (35 women and 620 men), 31 of whom had been released through prisoner-of-war swaps. Their cases are heard primarily before the Southern Military District Court in Rostov-on-Don on charges of “terrorism” or “espionage” and “extremism”; they face 20 years in prison to life imprisonment.

97. Over a hundred Ukrainians are held in SIZO-1 in Rostov-on-Don. Iury Petrov, a civilian from Melitopol, was detained in April 2022, beaten and tortured, and deported to the Lefortovo pretrial detention facility in Moscow, before being formally charged with terrorism. He was denied adequate medical care despite his serious health condition. Four other men from Melitopol, also charged with terrorism, were tortured and one attempted suicide after the authorities threatened his parents. Konstantin Reznik, from Kherson region, was held incommunicado in a basement, starved, tortured with electric shocks, beaten and suspended from a hook in the wall.

⁵² See A/HRC/57/59 and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “Report on violations and abuses of international humanitarian and human rights law, war crimes and crimes against humanity, related to the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilians by the Russian Federation” (Moscow Mechanism report), 25 April 2024.

He is currently in SIZO-1 in Rostov-on-Don, awaiting trial on charges of terrorism together with eight other Ukrainians.

98. At least a hundred Ukrainian civilians in detention in the Russian Federation are in a critical state of health and denied access to adequate and timely medical care, putting their lives at risk.

99. Members of the Ukrainian Azov and Aidar battalions have received particularly harsh treatment. Since their arrest in early 2022, they have been exposed to prolonged beatings until losing consciousness, starvation, and mock executions. Some had their fingernails or toenails torn out. All were tortured to extract military-related information. Some attempted suicide; many died in custody because of torture and denial of life-saving medical care, including Oleksandr Ishchenko, who died in custody in July 2024.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

100. Although the systemic and deeply entrenched use of torture in the Russian Federation has been documented for the past three decades, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked an expansion of torture as a tool for repression at home and aggression abroad. Russian authorities rarely face accountability. This impunity has contributed to its “normalization” in society and the “legitimization” of a culture of violence.

101. The inadequate Russian legal framework fails to effectively address and prosecute acts of torture and ill-treatment. Despite the obligations of the Russian Federation under the Convention against Torture, torture is not defined as a distinct criminal offence. Rather, such crimes are subsumed under less serious crimes such as “abuse of power” that fail to recognize the special stigma attached to the crime of torture and fail to provide penalties commensurate with its gravity. In addition, the lack of meaningful investigations into reports of torture and ill-treatment allows perpetrators to avoid accountability for their actions.

102. The State not only condones but actively participates in acts of torture, using it as a method to extract confessions, punish dissenters and maintain control. Torture and ill-treatment are rampant in police custody, in pretrial and administrative detention and throughout penitentiary facilities, with reports of systematic physical and sexual violence.

103. The acceptance of torture extends to the judiciary, where confessions obtained through torture are allowed as evidence, particularly in cases of terrorism, national security and politically motivated charges.

104. The appalling conditions of detention in Russian prisons along with the ill-treatment of detainees are calculated to bring maximum suffering and humiliation, often amounting to torture and leading to loss of life in custody. Excessive solitary confinement, the routine denial of medical care even for life-threatening conditions, the abuse of psychiatry and other punitive measures are used widely, particularly against political prisoners and those deemed “problematic” by the authorities.

105. Psychiatric facilities are misused, particularly to punish those who complain about their conditions of detention or treatment. Once there, detainees are subjected to torture and abuse, forced administration of heavy doses of psychotropic drugs and threats from other inmates coerced by the prison administration.

106. Groups vulnerable to discrimination, including LGBT persons, migrants and asylum-seekers, are at heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment. The lack of a legal framework criminalizing gender-based violence leaves women and girls vulnerable

to various forms of violence, including “honour killings” and female genital mutilation in the North Caucasus, perpetrated with the acquiescence and, often, complicity of State actors.

107. Russian authorities also employ torture against conscientious objectors, those who refuse mobilization, and servicemen, to force them to fight in the war against Ukraine.

108. The practice of arbitrary detention of Ukrainians by the Russian military and security forces has been ongoing, even prior to the full-scale invasion of 2022. Ukrainians are forcibly transferred elsewhere in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine or deported to the Russian Federation, kept incommunicado and subjected to widespread and systematic torture and ill-treatment, including rape and other sexual violence.

109. Investigations into allegations of torture are often inadequate and biased, leading to a culture of impunity. Complaints are frequently dismissed during preliminary inquiries without the initiation of formal proceedings. Some instances of criminal charges being brought against perpetrators notwithstanding, many cases result in minimal penalties or conditional sentences, underscoring systemic issues in holding offenders accountable.

110. Independent detention oversight and monitoring mechanisms are notably ineffective in the Russian Federation, which has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. Pressure on torture victims to recant their complaints, including by instigating retaliatory criminal charges, conceals the extent of torture.

111. Serious, effective efforts to address and prevent torture and ill-treatment in the Russian Federation must rectify the current inadequate legal and institutional framework and require prompt, impartial and effective investigations into allegations of torture, especially within law enforcement and penal institutions. Those found guilty must be held properly accountable, with punishment commensurate with the crime.

112. The use of torture and ill-treatment, especially in this systematic and State-sanctioned manner, is a severe violation of the international human rights obligations of the Russian Federation. Therefore, the Special Rapporteur makes the recommendations below.

113. The Special Rapporteur recommends that Russian authorities:

(a) **Recognize, engage and constructively cooperate with this mandate, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions and the obligation to engage with human rights mechanisms non-selectively, to address the systematic and widespread torture and ill-treatment identified in the present report; and provide unhindered access for the Special Rapporteur to the country and meaningful engagement with all relevant stakeholders as well as access to all places of deprivation of liberty in the Russian Federation;**

(b) **Undertake fundamental reforms, including constitutional, legislative and administrative reforms, to establish an effective system of accountability in line with international law and to ensure the separation of powers, political pluralism and democratic participation in governance and decision-making;**

(c) **Criminalize torture as a distinct crime in domestic legislation, as required by article 1 of the Convention against Torture, and ensure that the applicable penalties are commensurate with the gravity of the crime of torture, as prescribed by article 4;**

(d) Introduce the criminal offences of other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, fully reflecting articles 2 and 16 of the Convention against Torture, and ensure that the applicable penalties are commensurate with the gravity of these crimes;

(e) Ensure the effective application of the absolute prohibition of torture within the armed forces of the Russian Federation, including during compulsory training, conscription, mobilization, recruitment, and regular and active service. Specific training on this prohibition should be carried out across all ranks of the armed forces, making it clear that the orders of superiors can never serve as a legitimate justification for carrying out torture or other ill-treatment;

(f) Eliminate the use of forced confessions, as required by article 15 of the Convention against Torture, by, inter alia, implementing the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information-Gathering (the Méndez Principles) to assist the work of law enforcement and security agencies; and allow access to legal representation during questioning, eliminate confessions as a cornerstone of the investigative process, effectively investigate all allegations of forced confessions and the use of excessive force, and ensure that confessions obtained through torture or ill-treatment are never admitted as evidence in court;

(g) Safeguard the right of all alleged victims of torture and ill-treatment, as well as of their families, to submit complaints regarding such treatment and have their cases examined promptly, effectively and impartially by competent and independent authorities; and take effective steps to ensure that the complainant and witnesses are protected against any reprisals and/or intimidation because of the complaint or evidence given, as required by article 13 of the Convention against Torture;

(h) Ensure prompt and impartial investigation of all allegations of torture and deaths in custody by competent and impartial authorities, consistent with international standards and especially in line with article 12 of the Convention against Torture; immediately end the use of torture and other ill-treatment; and prosecute those responsible, including public officials and law enforcement officers, and if convicted, sanction them in a manner commensurate with the gravity of the crime;

(i) Ensure that victims of torture and ill-treatment are provided access to means of obtaining redress; and, to this end, secure the right to effective and adequate remedy and reparation to all victims of torture and ill-treatment, including the right to adequate compensation, as full a rehabilitation as possible and guarantees of non-repetition;

(j) Guarantee that the provision of healthcare in all places of deprivation of liberty in the Russian Federation is independent of law enforcement and security forces and that all those deprived of their liberty receive required medical assistance and treatment without delay;

(k) Abolish the practice of punitive psychiatry used to detain or punish individuals on politically motivated or other arbitrary grounds, and ensure that victims are provided access to justice, rehabilitation and redress;

(l) Ensure that judges, prosecutors, health workers and others working in spheres relating to the documentation and investigation of torture and ill-treatment receive adequate initial and continuous training on the basis of the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol) and other international standards relating to torture and ill-treatment;

(m) Immediately ensure that the conditions of detention as well as applicable regimes in all places of deprivation of liberty in the Russian Federation are respectful of the inherent dignity of human beings and that the detention system does not aggravate the suffering inherent in such a situation;

(n) Immediately cease the use of prolonged solitary confinement (especially in punitive isolation cells such as SHIZO and PKT) in violation of rules 43 and 44 of the Nelson Mandela Rules and ensure that any disciplinary sanctions in prisons, including solitary confinement, are administered solely in accordance with the Rules;

(o) As recommended at the special (126th) meeting of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, implement unified databases detailing the whereabouts of all detainees in the penitentiary system and ensure that reliable access to such resources is provided to lawyers, relatives of detainees, public monitoring commission members, and members of the public councils under the territorial bodies of the Federal Penitentiary Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation;

(p) End torture and ill-treatment of conscientious objectors to military service, including in the context of mobilization to fight in the war on Ukraine; and ensure that article 59 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation is respected and observed, affirming the right to conscientious objection and the right to replace military service with alternative civilian service in case a person's convictions or religious beliefs preclude military service and in other cases provided by federal law;

(q) Guarantee consistent application of the process for the evaluation of citizens requesting to undertake alternative civilian service under the Alternative Civilian Service Act, Law No. 113-FZ of 25 July 2002; and ensure that chapter 22 of the Code of Administrative Judicial Procedure, which allows that decisions reached by the military recruitment commissions may be challenged before the courts, is fully respected and applied;

(r) Unequivocally condemn discrimination against LGBT persons and ensure the protection of LGBT persons' human rights, especially in the North Caucasus, by ending the practice of abducting, torturing, blackmailing and unlawfully detaining them and by ensuring the accountability of all perpetrators; implement the necessary measures to overcome and eradicate societal stereotypes that perpetuate such discrimination and treatment; and immediately close all institutions, facilities and settings, be they official or unofficial, including private ones, that carry out "conversion therapies" or similar practices, and ensure that these practices are permanently eradicated;

(s) Criminalize all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, forced marriage, marital rape, female genital mutilation, violence in the name of "honour" and "honour killings"; bring to justice and ensure accountability for government authorities, including law enforcement officials, who have acquiesced or been complicit in such acts, as well as any perpetrators of such crimes; references to "provocative" or "immoral" behaviour to avoid criminal responsibility must be inadmissible; victims and witnesses must be afforded appropriate protection during all stages of investigation and court proceedings concerning gender-based violence; and ensure that law enforcement agencies prioritize the protection of women affected by or fleeing from domestic violence, forced marriage, coercion and control, and refrain from assisting relatives seeking their forcible return;

(t) Immediately address the widespread practices, particularly in the North Caucasus, of “honour killings” of women, girls and LGBT persons, by adopting effective legislative measures; carry out prompt and impartial investigations of all allegations of “honour killings” and punish all those responsible with penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime; investigate, prosecute and bring to justice all government authorities, in particular law enforcement officials, complicit and acquiescent in “honour killings”; prevent “honour killings” by carrying out targeted education of law enforcement personnel and the judiciary on the prohibition of “honour killings” as well as comprehensive and specific public awareness campaigns;

(u) Outlaw female genital mutilation and ensure implementation of this prohibition, effectively punishing any perpetrators; establish prompt, impartial, professional and independent investigations into cases of female genital mutilation, ensuring effective implementation of legislative provisions and providing compensation for physical and moral suffering to survivors of female genital mutilation; and, as victims often refrain from seeking assistance from authorities for fear of implicating relatives, alongside legal reforms, prioritize educational campaigns and community sensitization to ensure effective implementation of legislation prohibiting female genital mutilation;

(v) End torture and ill-treatment of migrants, asylum-seekers, ethnic and national minorities and Indigenous Peoples by law enforcement officials; take all measures necessary in law and in practice to prevent discrimination, stigmatization, hate speech, violence and other human rights violations and persecution on the grounds of race, ethnicity or country of origin, and ensure that those who commit or incite hate crimes are held accountable; and repeal the provisions of current laws that are incompatible with the State’s international human rights obligations;

(w) Ensure that the conditions and regime in all migration detention centres meet international standards and are respectful of the inherent dignity of all human beings;

(x) Fully implement the obligation of non-refoulement so that persons facing the well-founded risk of torture and ill-treatment in their countries of origin are not forcibly returned; and ensure that any stateless persons and other persons who cannot legally be removed from the territory of the Russian Federation are not detained pending deportation, leading to de facto indefinite immigration detention prohibited by international law;

(y) Immediately end and prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, sexual violence or any other ill-treatment of Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war detained by Russian forces, including those under their effective control, and by other Russian authorities; immediately conduct prompt, full and impartial investigations into all allegations of such acts; and prosecute those responsible and ensure that the penalties applied are commensurate with the gravity of crimes committed;

(z) Adopt effective measures to rigorously prevent occurrences of torture and other ill-treatment by systematically reviewing and revising the domestic legal framework of the Russian Federation to: (i) ensure effective safeguards against torture and ill-treatment, especially the right to a lawyer from the very outset of detention, the right to inform a third person of the detention, the right to independent medical examination and the right to be promptly presented before a judicial authority; (ii) ensure initial and continual training of all police, security, military, prison and other law enforcement personnel on the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment and inappropriate use of force; and

(iii) systematically review and consistently update interrogation and prison rules to eliminate risk factors for torture and ill-treatment as well as to ensure consistency with the Nelson Mandela Rules;

(aa) Ensure regular and independent oversight of all places of deprivation of liberty by the public monitoring commissions; in this regard, ensure that the composition of these commissions does not compromise their actual and perceived independence and ensure their functional autonomy by providing sufficient resources for their effective functioning; and constructively engage with the public monitoring commissions on the implementation of their recommendations;

(bb) Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and set up its national preventive mechanism in full compliance with the provisions of the Optional Protocol,⁵³ ensuring complementarity with the work of the public monitoring commissions.

114. The Special Rapporteur further recommends that the international community and States Members of the United Nations:

(a) Exercise domestic criminal jurisdiction, including universal jurisdiction, that they are competent to prosecute with respect to any allegations of torture perpetrated against individuals in the Russian Federation;

(b) Ensure effective implementation of the absolute prohibition of refoulement in respect of any survivor of torture present on their territory who might be considered for return to the Russian Federation.

⁵³ [CAT/C/RUS/CO/6](#), para. 24.