



Briefing on the Reality of Torture in the Arab World

On the Occasion of the International Day in
Support of Victims of Torture
26 June 2026





Briefing on the Reality of Torture in the Arab World

On the Occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

26 June 2026

I. Introduction

The International Day in Support of Victims of Torture falls this year at a defining moment, as the Arab region witnesses a sharp and unprecedented erosion of the fundamental legal guarantees protecting individuals from abuse. Torture has ceased to be a matter of isolated practices or individual violations subject to investigation; in numerous contexts, it has been transformed into a structural instrument institutionally employed to manage prisons and detention centres, control public space, and silence voices of dissent and human rights defenders.

The undersigned human rights organisations issue this briefing on the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture (26 June) as a monitoring and legal document aimed at exposing patterns of systematic torture across the Arab world and at bringing to light the victims whom authorities seek to reduce to nameless figures behind prison walls.

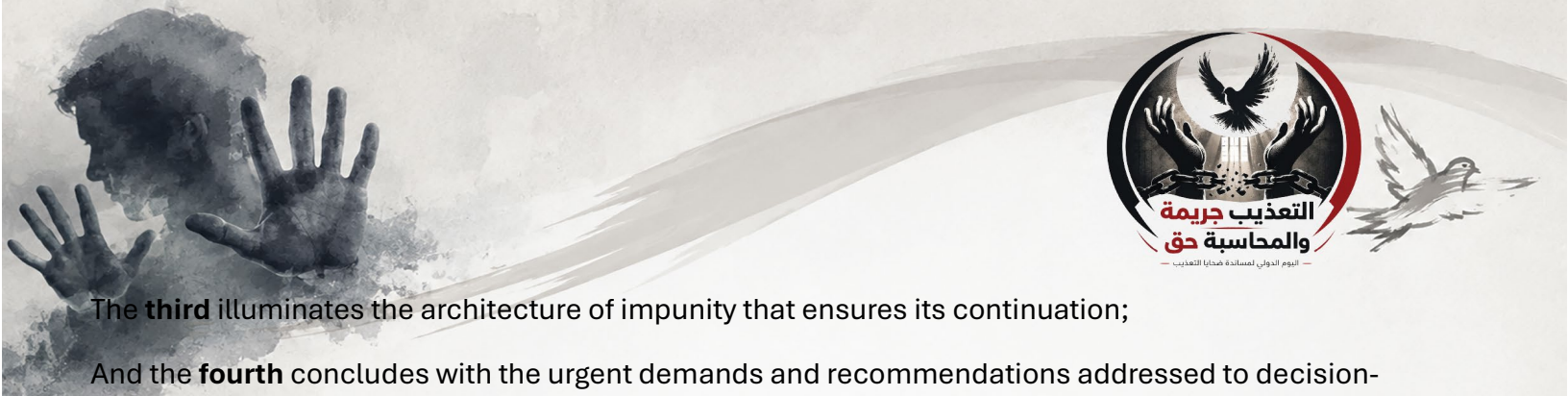
The testimonies and living, updated evidence documented by our field teams and partners compel us to move beyond the conventional language of condemnation and to proceed directly toward the activation of international accountability mechanisms. Torture is an absolute prohibition under international law — no war, no political polarisation, and no invocation of security imperatives can justify it.

In order to provide a systematic reading and comprehensive overview of the dimensions of this file, the present briefing addresses the current situation through four principal axes:

The **first** surveys the field realities and documented patterns across the region;

The **second** deconstructs the governing international legal framework on the crime of torture;





The **third** illuminates the architecture of impunity that ensures its continuation;

And the **fourth** concludes with the urgent demands and recommendations addressed to decision-makers and international bodies.

II. First: Documented Facts — Contexts and Patterns of Torture in the Region

Through this report, our organisations document systematic patterns of torture and ill-treatment across several Arab contexts. Under customary international humanitarian law and Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, the prohibition of torture is binding upon both states and non-state armed parties alike:

1. Palestine / Gaza

In the context of the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza since October 2023, our organisations have received credible testimonies describing the torture of Palestinian detainees in Israeli military detention facilities, encompassing sexual assault, physical harm, prolonged solitary confinement, systematic humiliation, and the denial of medical care to the wounded. UN bodies have likewise documented the detention of healthcare workers and journalists in direct contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in time of war.

Independent monitoring mechanisms remain severely limited in light of Israeli restrictions on access to detention sites.

2. Egypt: A Policy of Systematic and Institutional Torture and Abuse

Torture and ill-treatment in Egypt's prisons, detention facilities, and security premises have long surpassed the threshold of individual violations or conventional patterns of physical harm, rising instead to the level of a deliberate, systematic, and officially sanctioned administrative policy.

A close examination of this file reveals the deliberate construction of a comprehensive environment designed for "institutional abuse," in which procedural loopholes and regulatory texts are exploited as legal cover to physically and psychologically break detainees and strip them of their humanity gradually through three destructive tracks:



Torture by Neglect (Slow Killing): This manifests in the deliberate and routine denial of medication and medical care, the prohibition of family visits, and the conversion of detention facilities into instruments for the physical liquidation of political detainees without visible trace — rather than functioning as lawful liberty-restricting facilities as required by law. Field documentation lays bare the scale of this catastrophe: 1,266 detainees died inside prisons between 2013 and 2025 as a result of torture and systematic medical neglect, with a further 13 deaths recorded inside detention facilities in the first months of 2025 alone.

Torture by Time (Open-Ended Punishment): This manifests in the conversion of pre-trial detention from an exceptional legal measure into an open-ended pre-emptive punishment with no terminus, consuming detainees' lives through the practice of legal "rotation" — whereby individuals are re-detained on new fabricated charges immediately upon the issuance of judicial release orders. Field human rights reports documented 229 rotation incidents in 2023 and a further 206 incidents in the first half of 2024 alone, affecting lawyers, journalists, physicians, women, and minors.

Collective Torture (Violation Beyond the Walls): This is the pattern that extends beyond the detainee to target their family through harassment, visitation bans, and geographic displacement — breaking the detainee's will by tormenting their relatives and children.

All of the above is accompanied by traditional methods documented with precision, including beatings, electric shocks, suspension by the limbs, prolonged solitary confinement, and sexual violence. Approximately 75 documented cases of torture were recorded in official prisons and detention facilities between January 2024 and June 2025, concurrent with the documentation of enforced disappearance affecting more than 20,000 persons through the end of 2025.

This architecture of abuse is embodied in stark individual cases, most notably those of visual artist Ashraf Omar and journalist Khaled Mamdouh, both arrested in July 2024, held in complete isolation from the outside world, and subjected to torture and threats of electric shock to extract confessions under duress.

The **judiciary** and **public prosecution**, for their part, have met these crimes with tangible complicity that entrenches a state of near-total impunity: formal complaints submitted for the investigation of the deaths of seven individuals inside the Al-Omraniya Police Station in Giza between March 2024 and May 2025 were dismissed without any legal justification being provided.



Although Egyptian authorities accepted recommendations to protect detainees from torture during the UN Universal Periodic Review session in January 2025, they refused to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture — confirming the existence of a vast chasm between diplomatic rhetoric and practices carried out behind closed doors. Those practices clearly rise to the level of crimes against humanity, which are imprescriptible under international law and require the judicial prosecution of both their perpetrators and those who enable them.

3. Algeria

Algeria ratified the Convention Against Torture in 1989, yet continues to face serious allegations of torture and ill-treatment targeting political detainees, human rights defenders, and journalists.

Documented cases reveal a recurring pattern encompassing physical and psychological torture during solitary confinement, the coercive extraction of confessions, and the systematic refusal of the judiciary to examine allegations even when defendants raise them before the courts.

At the structural level, Algeria has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and possesses no independent national preventive mechanism conducting regular visits to places of detention. Prolonged detention in terrorism-related cases, compounded by severe restrictions on access to legal counsel, creates an environment conducive to torture while impeding its documentation and accountability.

In January 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders expressed serious concern over the continued criminalisation of human rights defenders more than a year after her visit to Algeria.

In February 2025, international organisations addressed a joint open letter to the UN Human Rights Council calling for Algeria to be held accountable for the escalating repression of civil society and peaceful dissent.

4. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia continues to face credible allegations of torture and ill-treatment targeting political detainees and prisoners of conscience.

Reports submitted by human rights organisations to the United Nations indicate that authorities routinely subject detainees to solitary and incommunicado confinement, while detainees are exposed to physical abuse by guards and medical neglect.





Among the most prominent documented cases is that of French national Mr. Amr Abdel Fattah, arrested by security forces on 16 June 2024 in Mecca after Saudi authorities discovered that his Hajj permit was invalid — he having fallen victim to an organised Hajj visa fraud network — despite having entered the Kingdom in an ostensibly lawful manner with the intention of performing the pilgrimage. Rather than being deported in accordance with the law, he was arbitrarily detained for more than eleven months before any court referral, and remains in detention to this day. During this period, he was subjected to brutal torture including severe beatings, death threats, and being kicked and forcibly thrown against a wall — leading to his emergency hospitalisation, according to his family's account. In January 2026, our organisations issued an urgent appeal to the international community and the global conscience calling for immediate intervention to save Mr. Amro Abdel Fattah's life, as he faces the risk of death, torture, and enforced disappearance inside Saudi prisons.

Furthermore, a number of scholars and public intellectuals continue to face a slow death in detention under unjust sentences and adverse conditions of imprisonment, among them Salman Al-Ouda, Safar Al-Hawali, and Awad Al-Qarni — against whom the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has issued opinions confirming the arbitrary nature of their detention, pursuant to complaints filed by Karama before the Working Group.

5. United Arab Emirates

Our organisations concur that the UAE pursues a systematic framework of torture and ill-treatment targeting opponents and human rights defenders domestically, in addition to its documented complicity in torture crimes beyond its borders. On the domestic front, the Federal Supreme Court issued rulings in June 2025 increasing the number of life sentences to 67 in the series of grossly unjust mass trials extending from the "UAE 94" case, under conditions of prolonged solitary confinement which the court refused to suspend even during the month of Ramadan.

Human rights defender Ahmed Mansour, detained since March 2017, remains a stark example; he spends years in absolute solitary confinement with near-total deprivation of family visits.

On the regional front, the UAE is implicated in torture crimes in three conflict hotspots:

- **In Yemen**, through Southern Transitional Council forces which operate secret detention sites where human rights organisations have documented enforced disappearance and torture.





• **In Sudan**, where accumulating evidence reveals UAE support for the Rapid Support Forces accused of war crimes and genocide in Darfur, which prompted the Sudanese government to file a case before the International Court of Justice in April 2025, describing the UAE as “the primary driver of the ongoing genocide.”

• **In Libya**, through support for militias documented to be involved in systematic kidnapping and torture. The UAE continues to refuse to ratify the Convention Against Torture and keeps its detention facilities completely sealed off from any independent international oversight.

6. Yemen

Human rights organisations and activists have documented the continuation of torture policies by multiple parties, including forces loyal to the government and the Houthi group, in secret detention centres lacking any judicial oversight or independent monitoring.

Documented testimonies indicate **electric shock, suspension in painful positions, sleep deprivation, and sexual violence** against both **men** and **women** in a number of detention facilities.

Compounding the gravity of this reality is the fact that more than ten years of conflict have produced a parallel detention system operating outside the framework of the state and official accountability mechanisms.

The circle of victims extends to African migrants transiting through Yemen en route to Gulf states, where organisations have documented their detention by the Houthi group in appalling conditions and their subjection to grave violations, with no accountability whatsoever for perpetrators. Human trafficking networks operated by Houthi leaders also contribute to handing over some of these migrants to armed gangs in border areas, who subject them to extortion and torture in exchange for imposing financial fees to allow their passage, amid the deliberate complicity or acquiescence of de facto authorities in halting these crimes or prosecuting their perpetrators.

The question of the limits of **impunity** is renewed as journalists released from Houthi prisons continue to demand accountability for the head of the Houthi Committee for Prisoners and Captives Affairs, Abdul Qader al-Murtada, whose direct involvement—including, according to their testimonies, in torturing them and subjecting them to forms of brutal treatment during their years of detention—was recounted by a number of formerly abducted journalists. Released journalists have called upon the UN Special Envoy to Yemen to exclude al-Murtada and his deputy from prisoner exchange negotiations, yet these demands



remain largely unanswered in the absence of any effective international mechanism to refer the file to judicial accountability.

7. Sudan

Since the outbreak of armed conflict in April 2023, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and partner human rights organisations have documented credible allegations of systematic torture by the Rapid Support Forces against civilian detainees, alongside widespread sexual violence described by UN experts as amounting to war crimes. The absence of judicial oversight and the paralysis of civilian state apparatuses have frozen any serious effort towards investigation or accountability.

8. Libya

Against the backdrop of chronic political and institutional division, UN and human rights monitors continue to document torture in detention centres run by armed militias operating outside any central authority or judicial oversight.

Reports indicate that detained migrants and refugees are subjected to appalling violations including torture, sexual violence, and the coercive extraction of confessions, while international investigators face serious obstacles hindering their access to these facilities.

9. Iraq

Our organisations document credible testimonies detailing torture in detention facilities belonging to armed factions operating outside civilian control, including the detention of individuals in secret sites and the use of coerced confessions as evidence in judicial proceedings.

The de facto impunity enjoyed by these factions obstructs any serious investigation, while victims who file complaints are subjected to pressure and intimidation.

10. Lebanon

Torture in Lebanon remains an open wound in the body of justice, having transformed from an exceptional practice into an entrenched culture within certain security and judicial apparatuses. These institutions do not merely commit violations but also work to provide cover for perpetrators and facilitate their impunity through procedural manipulation, the neglect of complaints, and the destruction of evidence.



Field patterns document practices affecting multiple categories, including minors. In one case study issued in June 2026, Army Intelligence arrested a 16-year-old Lebanese minor in Tripoli; he was beaten and tortured, and held for an extended period to ensure the disappearance of physical evidence before being handed over.

When he appeared before the investigating judge and informed her of the torture—after she herself observed the swelling of his nose—she took no action, instead issuing a detention warrant against him, closing the file on the basis of his conviction, before legal action was taken to request the appointment of an independent forensic physician.

This case intersects with a broader structural pattern documented in human rights reports submitted to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, encompassing the absence of independent oversight over detention facilities belonging to security agencies, the use of counter-terrorism and organised crime laws as pretexts for arbitrary detention and coercive extraction of confessions, and the referral of torture complaints to bodies lacking independence

Compounding this reality is the deterioration of humanitarian conditions resulting from the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, which has produced a severe displacement crisis that has exacerbated the vulnerability of groups most exposed to violations, including refugees, migrants, and displaced persons.

Despite Lebanon's ratification of the Convention Against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the implementation of these commitments remains contingent upon a political and judicial will that is conspicuously absent.

In response to these challenges, the importance of specialised rehabilitation centres for victims of torture has emerged; these centres, opened in late 2024, provide medical, psychological, social, and legal support to victims. To date, they have received 107 torture victims, provided hundreds of therapeutic sessions and services, and are following up on dozens of legal files related to torture, detention, and enforced disappearance.

Within the framework of Lebanon's Universal Periodic Review before the Human Rights Council in January 2026, member states issued a series of recommendations concerning the fight against torture, including ensuring independent investigation into all allegations, strengthening the independence of the national preventive mechanism, improving detention conditions, combating impunity, and guaranteeing victims' access to redress and reparation.





The Human Rights Council is scheduled to adopt Lebanon's final report at its session convening in late June 2026, representing an important opportunity for the Lebanese authorities to demonstrate their commitment to implementing these recommendations and translating their international obligations into concrete measures.

11. Tunisia

Human rights concerns continue to mount over the sharp regression in human rights conditions in Tunisia since July 2021, against the backdrop of the undermining of judicial independence and the expansion of politically motivated prosecutions and trials. This has been accompanied by an alarming escalation in torture and ill-treatment practices inside places of detention, including beatings, electric shock, and sexual torture, in addition to the deaths of a number of detainees under troubling circumstances.

UN mechanisms and international organisations have likewise documented grave violations targeting political detainees, refugees, and migrants, reflecting a return to repressive practices that contravene Tunisia's international human rights obligations.

In this context, human rights bodies continue to monitor the conditions of political prisoners in Tunisia, expressing grave concern over the deterioration of their health and the denial of adequate medical care.

The case of Ennahda Movement leader Rachid Ghannouchi is particularly illustrative; his health has deteriorated to the point of requiring hospitalisation, amid repeated calls for his release and that of other elderly or ailing detainees, while Tunisian authorities continue to refuse to comply with the decisions of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention regarding Ghannouchi and other leaders.

The continued detention of these individuals in conditions of medical neglect and harsh treatment may amount to cruel or inhuman treatment, and constitutes a flagrant violation of a series of international instruments ratified by Tunisia, most notably the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules), which obligate states to guarantee healthcare for all detainees and provide humane conditions of detention; Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits torture and cruel or degrading treatment; Article 10 of the same Covenant, which affirms the right of every person deprived of their liberty to be treated with humanity and respect for their dignity; and the UN Principles for Older Persons, which obligate states to safeguard their health and dignity.





On the basis of the foregoing, the Commission has recommended the humanitarian release of

III. Second: International Legal Framework — No Exception, No Prescription

This report is grounded in a series of definitive international legal obligations, as follows:

1. The UN Convention Against Torture (1984): The Convention obligates states parties to criminally prohibit torture, to conduct immediate investigations into any allegation, to prosecute suspected offenders or extradite them in accordance with the principle *aut dedere aut judicare* (extradite or prosecute), as well as to provide compensation and rehabilitation for victims. Most of the states referenced herein are parties to this Convention, thereby rendering these obligations binding upon them. Moreover, the prohibition of torture constitutes a prohibition under international law even for states that have not ratified the Convention Against Torture, by virtue of the principle of *jus cogens*.
2. Customary International Humanitarian Law: Rules 87 and 90 of the 2005 ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study obligate all parties to armed conflict—whether states or non-state armed groups—to treat detainees humanely and to observe an absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment under all circumstances.
3. The Principle of *Jus Cogens* (Peremptory Norm): The Committee Against Torture and numerous international courts have affirmed that the prohibition of torture carries a peremptory character in public international law, meaning it admits of no exception or suspension by agreement or under the pretext of necessity, whether in times of war, states of emergency, or counter-terrorism operations. It is not subject to prescription and states cannot be absolved of accountability for it under any pretext.
4. The Principle of Non-Refoulement: International law obligates states not to deport any person to a state where they face a real risk of torture. This obligation extends beyond treaties to the level of customary international law, and applies equally to donor states and international security partners.





IV. Third: Impunity — The Primary Guarantee for the Continuation of Torture

Torture will not cease so long as its perpetrators remain beyond the reach of accountability.

Through documented field assessments, our organisations concur that a shared architecture for the production of impunity operates across the contexts under review, consisting of:

- The marginalisation of an independent judiciary and its subordination to security or military authorities that shield their personnel from prosecution.
- The absence of independent oversight over detention facilities and the lack of transparency regarding the number and whereabouts of detainees.
- Systematic pressure on victims, witnesses, lawyers, and organisations to deter them from filing complaints or appearing before UN monitoring bodies.
- The invocation of security imperatives and states of emergency to suspend judicial safeguards and legitimise extrajudicial detention.
- The failure of international partners to condition their security cooperation on accountability, thereby fueling a culture of impunity and compounding the harm.

V. Fourth: Demands and Recommendations

On the basis of the foregoing monitoring and documentation, we, the signatory human rights group, call for the following demands:

1. To the governments of the states concerned and parties to conflict:

- An immediate and complete cessation of all practices of torture and ill-treatment in both official and unofficial detention facilities.
- Immediate and unconditional access for the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and independent monitors to all places of detention.
- The conduct of independent and transparent investigations into all allegations, and the prosecution of suspected perpetrators of torture in fair trials without delay.
- The provision of adequate compensation and rehabilitation for victims, and the prevention of recurrence through established structural measures.





- The lifting of immunity for members of security agencies and militias implicated in torture, and the repeal of all legal provisions that give effect to such immunity.
- 2. To the Human Rights Council and Relevant UN Bodies:**
- Establish independent international investigative mechanisms, or strengthen existing ones, in contexts where national bodies are unable to discharge this function.
 - Enforce the principle of universal jurisdiction and support the efforts of the International Criminal Court in prosecuting those responsible for the crime of torture.
 - Provide sustainable funding for programmes rehabilitating torture victims in the Arab region and for organisations engaged in monitoring violations.
- 3. To Donor States and International Security Partners:**
- Make security cooperation and financial assistance conditional upon verifiable human rights benchmarks, and suspend them where the beneficiary party is proven complicit in torture.
 - Refrain from accepting any intelligence obtained under coercion, and publicly disclose the policies governing this matter.

VI. Conclusion

The facts and figures presented in this report make clear that the persistence of torture across the Arab world is not merely a transient dysfunction within executive institutions, but a reflection of the absence of political will, the erosion of the rule of law, and the complicity of international parties that turn a blind eye to torturers under the pretext of preserving stability or safeguarding intelligence and security partnerships.

The partner human rights organisations affirm, in closing this briefing, that international silence and impunity are the true fuel sustaining these horrific violations.

They underscore that the sacrifices of detainees, victims, and their families shall not be in vain. Crimes against humanity — foremost among them torture — do not expire with the passage of time, and the map of violations documented today will serve tomorrow as a legal instrument before courts of justice and international mechanisms for the prosecution of all those who ordered, perpetrated, or concealed the stripping of detainees of their dignity and their years.

We release this report firmly committed to the continuation of the human rights struggle and to building a unified front for the advocacy of victims and the pursuit of perpetrators — until Arab prisons become facilities governed by the rule of law and entirely free from abuse.





Organisations Participating in the Campaign:

- AlKarama for Human Rights — Geneva
- Association of Victims of Torture — Geneva
- Justice for Human Rights Organization — Turkey
- EFDI International Organization — Belgium
- Free Voice for Human Rights Organization
- Tawasol for Human Rights — Netherlands
- Council of Egyptians' Rights — Geneva
- Human Rights Monitor — London
- Human Rights Solidarity Organization — Geneva
- CEDAR Center for Legal Studies — Lebanon

