



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Stop Torture Campaign FAQs

On torture:

1. How severe is the problem of torture around the world?

Amnesty International has reported on torture or other ill-treatment in 141 states over the past five years.

In many of these countries torture is routine and systematic, in others there are only isolated cases of ill-treatment.

We commissioned a global survey on attitudes to torture for the campaign that found almost half the respondents – from 21 countries and every continent – feared they would be at risk of torture if they were taken into custody.

2. How has AI reached the figure that 141 countries have tortured or ill-treated over the last five years?

The figure is the total number of countries where Amnesty International has reported on torture or other ill-treatment over the last five years.

It only includes reports that we have been able to verify and which we believe were credible enough to warrant investigation, so the true number of countries may be higher. The figure is not definitive, but a telling insight into the state of torture in the modern world. Each year our country teams record whether or not they have reported on torture or other ill-treatment during the year for our Annual Report, and we totaled the unique entries over the last five years to arrive at that figure.

3. Is Amnesty International saying torture is increasing? Is the situation getting worse or better?

The issue is not whether or not torture is increasing but that - 30 years after the Convention Against Torture was adopted at the UN - torture is still widespread in the world. This is totally unacceptable and Amnesty International believes it is time to take concrete steps to wipe out torture and ensure international obligations are met.

4. If torture can prevent a terrorist attack, shouldn't it be used selectively for the greater good?

Torture is never justifiable and any attempt to justify torture in one scenario undermines the absolute ban on torture. When a small number of states defended torture techniques during the 'War on Terror', they gave the green light to other governments wanting to torture in the name of national security – leading to the torture of political rivals, critical voices and activists.



5. Why does torture happen?

Torture happens because governments allow officials to abuse their powers over helpless detainees, because detainees are often dehumanised and because governments benefit from torture – or believe that they do.

Where detainees are denied prompt access to a lawyer and a court, they are at risk. When there is no access for independent experts to visit a detention centre, detainees are at risk. When governments fail to punish torturers for their actions, they send a signal to others that torture is acceptable. Conversely, when the treatment of detainees is monitored and governments investigate, prosecute and sentence a torturer, they show that torture will not be tolerated. Motivations for torture include extracting information or “confessions” to obtain ‘easy’ convictions, extorting money, punishment, humiliation and routine police procedure.

6. Most torture is done in secret, how can AI possibly report accurately on the scale of the problem?

Amnesty International does not claim to be able to give a definitive number of cases suffering from torture or other ill-treatment around the world, but through extensive and thorough research, we have, over a number of years, been able to bring to light thousands of credible torture cases that warrant investigation by the authorities.

This gives us an insight into the scale of the problem. The secrecy, fear and humiliation that accompanies torture means that inevitably thousands more cases are not reported to us – and of course our own resources are limited. The scale of the problem is likely to be greater still than we are able to provide evidence for.

On the campaign

7. Why does Amnesty International need another global campaign on torture?

We have the international legal framework in place to combat torture and we are now campaigning for states to implement it in their own laws, policy and practice and to make it effective: to make it harder to break anti-torture laws and to ensure that when they are broken those that do so are held to account.

We want to ensure there are independent checks on detention centres, prompt access to lawyers and courts, monitoring of interrogations, thorough, effective investigations into torture allegations leading to prosecutions and redress for victims. Progress is not enough - we will continue to campaign against torture until it is completely stamped out.

8. What can AI possibly hope to achieve in a two-year campaign?

The campaign has two primary objectives:

- To focus international attention on the continued prevalence of torture and other ill-treatment worldwide and to bring it to an end.
- To achieve particular success in five countries that we have selected because we believe we can influence by focusing the full weight of our movement’s efforts on them. We aim to achieve tangible improvement in the struggle against torture in those countries during the two year period of the campaign – in terms of legislation, policy and practice.

Overall we are campaigning for the implementation of new or improved safeguards to protect from and punish torture. These include independent checks on detention centres, monitoring of interrogations, prompt access to lawyers, courts and family members, thorough, effective investigations into torture allegations leading to prosecutions, and full redress to victims.

9. If the campaign is global, why is AI focusing on only five countries? What criteria did AI use to choose these priority countries? Which countries does the campaign focus on?

The campaign continues our historic research, media and advocacy work to fight torture in countries all over the world, but we are devoting additional resources and focusing our activists' efforts on the five countries of focus - Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Philippines and Uzbekistan.

We assessed a number of countries where torture is widespread, but selected these five because we believe we can achieve tangible improvement in the struggle against torture during the campaign timeframe – in terms of legislation, policy and practice.

For each we mapped out how we could reach our objectives in the next two years, and weighed up the impact positive developments in these countries could have on their immediate region. We hope that if these countries implement new or improved safeguards to protect from and punish torture – including independent checks on detention centres, monitoring of interrogations, prompt access to lawyers and courts, thorough, effective investigations into torture allegations leading to prosecutions and redress to victims – their neighbours will too.

10. Why is Amnesty International not including work on the detention centre at Guantanamo Bay as part of the torture campaign?

Although Guantanamo doesn't feature as a specific part of this campaign, our work on this and other prison camps around the world continues.

Amnesty International has campaigned on Guantanamo for more than eleven years. Ever since the USA and other states started responding to the appalling attacks of 9/11 we have consistently called on the USA and other governments complicit in human rights violations undertaken in the name of security - such as secret detentions, renditions, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill treatment and denial of basic legal safeguards - to fully respect human rights and end these practices. This work has been varied, has achieved certain results, has involved the international movement, and will continue as it's clearly a long-term struggle that requires consistent effort. Regardless of the new torture campaign, the work on shutting down Guantanamo and repatriating the detainees will carry on.

We feel that it's time now to focus not just on people tortured in the context of counter terrorism, but also the very many others who often get ignored. These include everyone from the petty criminal, the person with the 'wrong' ethnic, religious or sexual background or identity, the student, person in the wrong-place-at-the-wrong-time, the protestor, the activist, and anyone else who might be held in custody and subjected to the many forms of torture and other ill-treatment that are rampant in so many countries. We feel it is important to focus also on these individuals who suffer grave violations and on other governments that continue to torture without any checks or accountability.