

Amnesty International report details worldwide torture

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A report released by Amnesty International on Tuesday details the persistence and growth of torture in countries around the world over the past 30 years. “Torture is not just alive and well. It is flourishing,” the authors conclude.

Populations in many countries face torture, the report said, “at every stage of people’s interaction with police or security services, from being taken into custody through to detention and prison.” The report also notes frequent use of torture, including forms of sexual abuse, against children and young people by police forces.

Surveys conducted by Amnesty show that large numbers live in terror of being tortured, with 44 percent of people surveyed from 21 countries worldwide saying they feared being tortured if arrested by police or security personnel. Countries singled out include Mexico, Nigeria, Morocco, Philippines and Uzbekistan.

Speaking to the media, the report’s author acknowledged that a significant factor in the widespread use of torture has been the policies of the American government. “Since the so-called war against terrorism, the use of torture, particularly in the United States and their sphere of influence...has got so much more normalized as part of national security expectations,” said Salil Shetty of Amnesty.

However, Amnesty focused its analysis on a number of peripheral countries, though many of these have close relations with the major capitalist powers. In Nigeria, the report documents the case of Moses Akatugba, who was arrested in 2005 at age 16 by police. The police proceeded to beat him, hang him by his limbs for hours, and shoot him in the hand, in order to force him to sign a confession for a robbery he did not commit.

“The pain of torture is unbearable. I never thought I would be alive till this day. The pain I went through in

the hands of the officers was unimaginable. In my whole life, I have never been subjected to such inhuman treatment,” Akatugba said in testimony for the report.

In another case detailed in the report, Alfreda Disbarro was picked up by Philippine police, falsely accused of selling drugs, and taken at gunpoint to a police headquarters. Disbarro was brutally beaten as the police sought to extract a confession, with her head slammed against a wall, her eyes poked, and a mop shoved into her mouth.

Amnesty cites numerous psychological symptoms resulting from torture, including “anxiety disorders; depression; irritability; shame and humiliation; memory impairment; reduced capacity to concentrate; headaches; sleep disturbance and nightmares; emotional instability; sexual problems; amnesia; self-mutilation; preoccupation with suicide; and social isolation.”

Notably, Greece and Argentina registered the highest levels of opposition to torture, with between 85 and 90 percent rejecting its use under all circumstances. Both countries experienced CIA-backed military dictatorships that used systematic torture and murder to maintain power.

In Greece, after seizing power in a 1967 coup d’état, the US-backed junta quickly set up torture centers where the Greek military police practiced a range of tortures, including ripping out hair from the head and pubic regions, jumping on stomachs, pulling out toenails and fingernails, and shoving of clothes soaked in excrement down throats.

With the full support of the US government, the regime of Jorge Videla in Argentina tortured and murdered more than 20,000 workers and left-wing militants from 1976 to 1983, as part of its own “war on

terrorism.”

The report references the use of solitary confinement by the US, writing, “In some maximum security isolation or segregation facilities across the USA, many thousands of inmates are held in solitary confinement in small cells for 22 to 24 hours a day. Many have little access to natural light or out-of-cell recreation time which amounts to cruel inhuman or degrading treatment.”

However, Amnesty treats the use of torture by the US government as an unfortunate policy mistake, largely in the past, rather than as an organic outgrowth of its geo-strategy.

In reality, the US is a principal practitioner and promoter of torture. After the September 11 attacks, the US created a network of torture centers, known as “black sites,” spanning numerous countries including Thailand, Afghanistan, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania, where prisoners were routinely disappeared. The CIA itself perfected “enhanced interrogation” techniques.

During its occupation of Iraq, the US employed savage torture against the people of Iraq, most notoriously in the US-run prisons at Abu Ghraib.

President Barak Obama has further entrenched the torture regime, shutting down all investigations of abuses carried out under the previous administration and quashing countless lawsuits against the perpetrators. While the black sites have supposedly been shut down, Guantanamo Bay remains open, while the government has shifted its tactics in the direction of drone assassination.

The minimization of the role of the US imperialism in supporting torture and torture regimes is accompanied, on the part of Amnesty International, by a deliberate effort to single out regimes targeted for overthrow by the US.

For instance, Amnesty writes of “abuses against protesters and opposition activists in Russia, Azerbaijan and, most visibly, in Ukraine, in response to the EuroMaydan demonstrations. It is estimated that over a thousand people were injured as a result of the use of excessive force by police, including the shooting of more than a hundred individuals.”

In fact, the sniper fire that killed hundreds on the Maiden was directed by the US-backed, neofascist opposition forces that now control the reigns of the

security apparatus. These same forces have, with continuous support from the US, since carried out fresh atrocities including the massacre of more than a hundred people at the Trade Union House in Odessa.

With respect to Syria, Amnesty wrote, “Reports of torture and other ill-treatment in Syria have skyrocketed since protests in March 2011 drew a brutal response from the authorities.”

Unmentioned is the fact that US-backed, al Qaeda-linked Syrian opposition militias have regularly carried out summary mass executions and torture, and that the internal conflict was fomented by the US as part of its drive to dominate the entire Middle Eastern region.

Despite its occasional criticism of US policy, Amnesty International has close ties to Western governments and wealthy foundations. *NGO Monitor* noted in a 2012 report that the agency had received millions of pounds from Britain’s Department for International Development since 2008, as well as millions of euros from other governments in recent years. Financial reports show that Amnesty receives support from billionaire George Soros’s Open Society Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and other similar entities.

Amnesty’s executive director from 2011 to 2013, Suzanne Nossel, previously served as deputy assistant secretary for international organizations at the US State Department. Nossel also worked at as a vice president for the *Wall Street Journal* from 2005 to 2007.



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