



CHALLENGING REPRESSION

A GUIDE TO ADDRESSING THE
MISUSE OF POLICE WEAPONS
IN PROTESTS

ABOUT US

THE UNITED AGAINST TORTURE CONSORTIUM

The **United Against Torture Consortium (UATC)** brings together the **Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)**, the **International Federation of ACATs (FIACAT)**, the **International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)**, **Omega Research Foundation**, **REDRESS** and the **World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)**. Combining the expertise, capacity, and access to their respective networks, the UATC, through the six leading anti-torture organisations, is implementing, since June 2023, a collective programme of work to strengthen and expand the anti-torture movement.



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INTRODUCTION

Protests and public assemblies are an essential component of any free and democratic society. In recent years, however, public gatherings around the world have too often been met with excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies increasingly willing to use specialised equipment to suppress dissent. The excessive use of force by police and other security forces at protests stifles freedom of expression, prevents people from exercising their human rights, and may constitute [torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#).

Human rights and torture prevention civil society organisations (CSOs), healthcare professionals, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), national preventive mechanisms (NPMs), and international human rights observers all play a key role in monitoring protests, recording and documenting the misuse of weapons and equipment by police, and demanding accountability for the victims. This document is designed to provide practical guidance for these stakeholders to assist them in identifying, documenting, and challenging such misuse in a protest context. It complements several existing resources, including the [United Against Torture Consortium \(UATC\) Policy Paper – Protesting without Fear \(2025\)](#), the OSCE [Guide on Law Enforcement Equipment Most Commonly Used in the Policing of Assemblies](#) (2021), and [Lethal in Disguise 2](#) (INCLO and Physicians for Human Rights, 2023), and brings a specialist focus on equipment used in protest contexts.

1. LAW ENFORCEMENT WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT COMMONLY USED TO POLICE PUBLIC ASSEMBLIES

Around the world, law enforcement agencies deploy a wide range of weapons and equipment during demonstrations. It's important for monitors to know the most common types of equipment used, how to identify them, and to understand when their use might constitute torture or other ill-treatment, or in the worst cases lead to extrajudicial executions. It's also important to be able to differentiate between equipment that has no other purpose but torture and other ill-treatment and those types that may have a legitimate role in policing but can be easily misused to inflict torture and other ill-treatment.

The following sections outline the most common types of law enforcement equipment deployed at protests. Each section describes the equipment's key visual characteristics, potential health impacts, and patterns of misuse. Where relevant, the sections also highlight specific equipment types that are inappropriate for use in the policing of public assemblies

More detailed information about these and other types of equipment and the risks associated with their use is available on [Omega Research Foundation's website](#).

1.1 CHEMICAL IRRITANTS

Chemical irritants are substances specifically designed to disperse individuals or groups by causing sensory irritation and pain to the eyes, upper respiratory tract, and skin, compelling the target to move away from the source. This category of equipment includes tear gas (such as CS, CN, and CR), pepper sprays (OC or PAVA), as well as foul-smelling malodorants. Chemical irritants can be delivered via handheld, shoulder-worn, or backpack sprayers, hand-thrown grenades, or weapon-launched projectiles. In some cases, chemical irritants are delivered by aerial platforms attached to drones, and they can be mixed with water and dispersed using water cannons.



Hand thrown grenades



Launched projectiles



Handheld sprayers

Visual characteristics

Chemical irritants usually appear as visible clouds of smoke, vapor, or fine mist upon deployment. Tear gas is often emitted from grenades or cartridges as white or coloured smoke. Irritant sprays typically release a visible mist or stream. After use, metal, rubber, or plastic tear gas cartridges or grenades can often be found discarded on-site. These are usually cylindrical or spherical in shape and often have markings, which can be used to identify their manufacturer, country of origin, and/or technical specifications, for example, the calibre of the projectile or the type of irritant used, as well as the law enforcement unit responsible for their use.

Potential injuries¹

- Severe eye irritation and watering eyes
- Breathing difficulties, coughing, choking, or asphyxiation
- Vomiting
- Skin irritation, burns, blistering and severe allergic reactions
- Blunt force impact injuries from projectiles including bruises, internal bleeding, organ damage, bone fractures, concussions, or permanent blindness or even death.

Key human rights concerns

- Targeting of individuals who are peaceful or already restrained or under control
- Use in large quantities or in confined, enclosed or inadequately ventilated areas (such as subway stations) increases the risks of asphyxiation
- Use against vulnerable groups e.g., children, pregnant people, the elderly, or people with preexisting respiratory conditions may have greater physical or psychological impact
- Firing projectiles directly at individuals or crowds can cause severe blunt trauma injuries or death
- Deploying chemical irritants without adequate warning or sufficient time for crowds to disperse can lead to panic and stampedes as well as secondary injuries from crushing and falls.

1 For further details see: <https://tidsskrift.dk/torture-journal/article/view/144275>

1.2 STRIKING WEAPONS

Striking weapons are intended for close-quarters use to control or subdue individuals. They are designed to deliver controlled strikes to non-vital areas such as the limbs, to temporarily incapacitate individuals posing an immediate threat. These weapons can also be used defensively to block or parry attacks.

Batons are by far the most commonly used striking weapon, although in some countries, the use of inherently abusive striking weapons have also been documented. These include spiked batons, shields and body armour that incorporate metal spikes, studs, or serrated edges capable of puncturing skin and causing deep wounds; weighted batons and gloves, often containing metal inserts, which greatly increase the kinetic impact of a blows; whips and sjamboks designed to lash and tear the skin; and lathis, elongated bamboo or polycarbonate batons, whose extended length means that they can generate excessive impact force.



Visual characteristics

Striking weapons can be made of a variety of materials including wood, plastic, rubber, or metal. They are most commonly black or dark-coloured. Batons can be straight, side-handled (tonfa-style), or extendable. Standard law enforcement batons range in length from 20cm to 60cm, though some lathis may be up to 2m in length. Spiked batons, shields and body armour can be recognised by the distinctive metal or rubber spikes or studs.

Weighted gloves are made of leather with reinforced knuckles or metal inserts covering the back of the hand. Whips and sjamboks are flexible and elongated. They are usually made of braided leather or rubber, and may taper towards the striking end.

Potential injuries

- Bone fractures
- Bruising
- Severe head injuries, including concussions or traumatic brain injuries
- Internal organ injuries
- Hyperextension and joint damage if used to lever limbs for pain compliance
- Asphyxiation if used to apply a neck hold
- Secondary injuries from crushing or falls during panic caused by baton charges

Key human rights concerns

- Targeting of peaceful protestors or bystanders or individuals who are already restrained or under control
- Striking vulnerable areas such as the head, neck, and spine increases the risk of serious injury
- Use of a baton “end-on” to jab/drive into the body increases the risk of injury to internal organs
- Repeated strikes or beatings
- Use of unauthorised or improvised striking weapons, such as sticks or metal poles
- Baton charges intended to intimidate or create panic in a crowd increase the risk of crushing injuries or falls.
- Use of a baton to lever limbs, crush parts of the body, or apply a neck or choke hold
- Use of batons or other striking weapons to commit rape or sexual assault.

1.3 KINETIC IMPACT PROJECTILES

Kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs) - sometimes referred to as “rubber bullets” – are designed as a less lethal alternative to live ammunition. They are designed to enforce compliance and subdue a subject through blunt trauma and pain without causing life-threatening or penetrating injuries.

KIPs come in a range of calibres and sizes and can be made of a variety of materials including plastic, rubber, wood, and foam. Ammunition can contain either single or multiple projectiles and can be fired from a wide range of weapons, including conventional small arms such as shotguns and pistols, as well as single or multi-barrel grenade launchers and specialist compressed air launchers.

The specific design, size, and material of the projectile as well as the launcher it is fired from can have significant implications for its accuracy, impact force, and subsequent risks. Although not designed to penetrate the skin, kinetic impact projectiles that impact with excessive force can cause devastating injuries and even death, especially if fired at close range or at sensitive parts of the body. Furthermore, the use of kinetic impact ammunition containing multiple projectiles significantly increases the risk of serious injuries. The spread of these projectiles as they are fired means that they are inherently inaccurate and cannot be targeted at individuals especially in crowd control situations. The risks that multiple projectile ammunition pose means that they should never be used by law enforcement.



Visual characteristics

KIPs can be recognised by looking at both the weapons that fire them and the munitions themselves. Handheld launchers include, shotguns, grenade launchers - sometimes with revolver-style chambers – and specialist launchers which use compressed air to fire the projectile. KIPs may also be launched from freestanding or vehicle mounted multi-barrel launchers capable of firing multiple projectiles simultaneously. Although they can be made from a range of materials, projectiles are frequently cylindrical or spherical, made from dense rubber or rubber-coated metal. Bean bag rounds are small fabric pouches filled with lead pellets. Foam and sponge rounds are usually larger blunt projectiles with softer rounded tips. After deployment, evidence of use may include spent cartridge cases or discarded projectiles.

Injuries

- Bruising, abrasions, and lacerations
- Bone fractures
- Internal bleeding or organ damage
- Severe eye injuries or permanent blindness
- Concussion or other serious head injuries

Key human rights concerns

- Targeting of peaceful protestors or bystanders or individuals who are already restrained or under control
- Targeting vulnerable areas such as the head, neck, chest, or abdomen increase the risk of serious injury
- Firing at close range dramatically increases the risk of serious injury, as projectiles strike with far greater force and kinetic energy
- Indiscriminate firing into crowds, the use of ammunition containing multiple projectiles or use of multi-barrel launchers to fire multiple rounds simultaneously
- Using KIPs without adequate warning or opportunity for dispersal

1.4 ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS

Electric shock weapons emit an electric charge to incapacitate an individual or compel compliance through pain and/or the temporary loss of muscle control. In the context of the policing of protests, electric shock weapons can broadly be classified into two categories: projectile electric shock weapons and direct contact electric shock weapons.

Projectile electric shock weapons - commonly referred to by the brand name “Taser” - fire darts or probes attached to wires that deliver an incapacitating electric shock from

several meters away, causing neuromuscular incapacitation. Some models digitally log each use of the device, creating a record that can later be retrieved and used as evidence to support accountability.

Direct contact electric shock weapons, such as stun guns, stun batons, and electric shock shields, deliver a shock when pressed directly against an individual. These devices cause intense localised pain but do not generally cause neuromuscular incapacitation and should never be used by law enforcement.



Visual characteristics

Projectile electric shock weapons typically resemble handguns and are often carried in holsters on officers' belts. They are often – though not always – brightly coloured (yellow and orange are common colours) partly to help distinguish them from firearms. When fired, two small darts attached to thin wires are propelled towards the target. Direct contact devices include small, pistol-shaped or flashlight-shaped stun guns with exposed metal prongs, and batons with electrodes at the tip or along the shaft. Electric shock shields can be identified by metallic conductive strips on the face of the shield. Evidence of use may include discarded darts from projectile electric shock weapons or puncture or burn marks on clothing or skin.

Injuries

- Intense pain and muscle contractions
- Cardiac complications, including risk of cardiac arrest, particularly among vulnerable individuals
- Secondary injuries (e.g., concussions, fractures) from uncontrolled falls
- Burns or small puncture wounds from darts or prongs

Key human rights concerns

- Targeting of peaceful protestors or bystanders or individuals who already restrained or under control
- Repeated or prolonged shocks as a form of punishment or intimidation
- Targeting sensitive or vulnerable areas of the body, such as the head, neck, chest or genitals
- Use on vulnerable groups, such as children, elderly people, pregnant people
- Use of direct contact electric shock devices or projectile electric shock weapons in 'drive stun mode'.

1.5 STUN GRENADES

Stun grenades - also known as flash-bangs, or distraction or disorientation devices - are weapons that produce an intense flash of light and a loud blast to cause disorientation (temporary blindness, temporary loss of hearing and balance). Some variants also release chemical irritants, inert smoke, or rubber projectiles. They can be hand-thrown or weapon launched.

The explosive nature of stun grenades means that they have the potential to create serious and even life-threatening injuries due to the pressure of the blast or shrapnel from the fragmentation of the grenade, with the risk of serious injury increasing in accordance with a person's proximity to the blast. Given their indiscriminate nature and their propensity to cause panic, stun grenades are inappropriate for dispersing or policing assemblies.



Visual characteristics

Stun grenades vary in size and shape and colour but are typically cylindrical with metal, rubber, or hard plastic casings. Many hand-thrown models have a visible safety pin and fuse assembly. The casing of some devices includes circular holes or perforations. Spent stun grenades found at the scene may sometimes still bear legible markings identifying the manufacturer or specific model.

Injuries

- Hearing loss
- Burns
- Cuts and lacerations including severe eye injuries or permanent blindness from rubber projectiles, shrapnel, or fragments
- Blast/pressure injuries, including to the lungs or internal organs
- Amputation / severe hand or limb injuries, if detonated while being handled
- Secondary injuries from crushing or falls during panic caused by explosion

Key human rights concerns

- Stun grenades are wholly inappropriate for dispersing public assemblies. Nevertheless, monitors should be aware of the following practices that can increase the already severe risks of injury associated with their use.
- Firing or throwing devices directly among crowds
- Use of stun grenades in enclosed spaces where blast effects, fragmentation and fire risk are amplified and the risks of serious injury or death from stampedes is increased
- Deploying stun grenades without prior warnings or adequate time for crowds to disperse
- Continued use of stun grenades once crowds are already dispersing increases the risk of stampedes and crushing.

1.6 WATER CANNON

Water cannons are high-pressure water delivery systems, typically mounted on specialised vehicles. They are designed to disperse crowds by delivering powerful jets of water over a distance. They can also deliver water at lower pressure, to deter or demoralise those targeted. Most water cannon systems can direct water through manually or remotely-operated nozzles, often from an elevated position on the vehicle, enabling operators to target individuals or groups from tens of metres away.

While some models are designed solely for water deployment, others allow additives - such as chemical irritants, dyes, or malodorants - to be mixed into the water stream. Use of chemical irritants in water cannon increases the potential for harm and can result in the spread of irritants far beyond the intended target area.



Visual characteristics

Water cannon vehicles are usually large, truck-sized, and may be armoured. They are equipped with a water tank and one or more mounted nozzles or turrets. The nozzles are often positioned on the roof. Vehicles may have protective grilles, reinforced windows, and sometimes additional equipment such as loudspeakers or cameras. The water stream itself is visible when deployed, often producing a mist or spray around the main jet. Vehicles may have markings or logos indicating the manufacturer or model number, or the agency to whom it belongs.

Injuries

- Bruising and abrasions from the force of the water jet
- Bone fractures or internal injuries from close-range or high-pressure impact
- Eye injuries, including risk of blindness
- Hypothermia from prolonged exposure during cold weather
- Respiratory distress or chemical burns when irritants are mixed into the water
- Secondary injuries from falls or being knocked to the ground by the water jet

Key human rights concerns

- Use against peaceful protesters or bystanders
- Use at close range greatly increases the risk of serious injury due to the high pressure and impact force of the water jet.
- Use of water cannon as a means of dispersing chemical irritants
- Targeting vulnerable areas such as the head, neck, or upper body
- Deployment against protesters in freezing conditions poses a risk of causing hypothermia
- Failing to provide clear warnings or opportunities for dispersal prior to deployment

1.7 LIVE AMMUNITION

Live ammunition refers to lethal metal projectiles fired from firearms such as pistols, rifles, and shotguns. These munitions are designed to kill. According to the *UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials*, lethal firearms should not be used in the policing of protests except when “strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.”

Despite these standards, incidents involving the use of live ammunition against protesters continue to be documented worldwide. One type commonly used in crowd-control contexts are shotguns loaded with lethal birdshot or buckshot, multiple metal balls or pellets of varying size that disperse over a wide area when fired. In addition to its lethality for intended targets, this type of ammunition is also inherently inaccurate, and poses a significant risk of injury or death to bystanders.



Visual characteristics

Small sidearms such as pistols are typically carried in holsters on officers’ belts. Larger firearms, such as shotguns or rifles, may be carried in the hand or slung over the shoulder using a strap. Evidence of live ammunition use can include spent bullet casings or bullet fragments at the scene. Casings from pistol or rifle rounds are usually brass or steel and may bear markings identifying the manufacturer or calibre. Shotgun cartridges are cylindrical, often made of plastic or card, which may also display markings that indicate their origin and whether they contained less lethal projectiles (see section 2.3 on Kinetic Impact Projectiles) or lethal metal pellets. Bullet holes in surrounding structures may also provide evidence of the use of live ammunition. Shotgun ammunition produces distinctive spread patterns on impact. In some cases, the most apparent indication that live ammunition has been used is the nature of injuries sustained, such as severe penetrating wounds.

Note: Monitors should be aware that, in a number of jurisdictions, certain firearms predominantly used to fire conventional metal-jacketed ammunition are sometimes also used to fire less lethal ammunition, including in the context of public assemblies. For more information including images of some common types of less lethal launchers see the Omega Research Foundation [website](#).

Injuries

- Fatalities from direct gunshot wounds
- Permanent disability resulting from severe ballistic trauma
- Blindness or facial disfigurement caused by shotgun pellets
- Secondary injuries, such as crushing or falls, from panic triggered by gunfire

Key human rights concerns

- Use of firearms in protest policing where there is no imminent threat to life and less harmful means have not been exhausted

2. GATHERING EVIDENCE: DOCUMENTING THE MISUSE OF EQUIPMENT AT PROTESTS

Effectively challenging and preventing the misuse of police weapons and equipment during protests requires coordinated, evidence-based action by monitors. By systematically documenting the types of equipment used, understanding applicable regulations, and identifying patterns of abuse, monitors can influence policy, demand accountability, and protect human rights.

This section offers practical guidance and actionable steps for monitors committed to expose the misuse of police weapons and equipment during assemblies. Drawing on best practices and successful examples from across the globe, each subsection outlines methods for gathering evidence and documenting abuses involving the use of police weapons and equipment at protests.

2.1 KNOW THE LAW

Understanding the legal framework that governs police use of force and equipment in your country is an essential first step for challenging the misuse of law enforcement weapons at protests. It is important for monitors to familiarise themselves with the international and regional standards as well as the domestic laws that regulate policing of assemblies. By mapping these laws, monitors will be able to assess whether police use of force is lawful and identify gaps between national regulations and international obligations.

PolicingLaw.info is an online database managed by the University of Johannesburg's Faculty of Law that reviews national laws on police use of force and firearms. It provides a valuable point of reference for monitors seeking to understand their country's legal framework and compare it with international standards.

a) International and regional standards

At the global level, there are well-established norms and standards governing law enforcement use of force at protests (See Annex 1). These are based on the six interlinked principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, precaution, non-discrimination and accountability:

Legality: the use of force must be clearly regulated by domestic law, consistent with international standards, and those laws and rules must be clear and accessible to the general public

Ask: Was force authorised and used with a clear legal basis? Are the relevant laws publicly available?

Precaution: Law enforcement operations must be planned and conducted in a way that avoids or minimises the use of force, with a focus on de-escalation, and providing advance warnings. Officers should have adequate training and be equipped to manage assemblies safely.

Ask: Were steps taken to de-escalate before the use of force? Were warnings given before force was used? Were officers appropriately trained and equipped?

Necessity: Force may only be used when it is strictly necessary to achieve a lawful and legitimate objective, with no reasonable alternative available. When used, it must be the minimum force required and end as soon as the need passes.

Ask: Could the threat have been dealt with through communication, negotiation, or other less harmful means? Did officers stop using force once it was no longer necessary?

Proportionality: the level and type of force used must be proportionate to the threat posed and the legitimate aim pursued, balancing the expected harm caused against the benefit achieved.

Ask: Did the threat justify the level of force used?

Non-discrimination: People must not be targeted on discriminatory grounds such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, or political affiliation. Authorities must also recognise that force affects people differently and take extra care to protect those at greater risk.

Ask: Were certain groups or individuals singled out or disproportionately affected by the use of force? Did police adapt their tactics to protect people facing higher risks of harm?

Accountability: States must investigate all alleged human rights violations and ensure that officials - including commanders - are held individually responsible for unlawful or excessive use of force.

Ask: Were those responsible for authorising or using force identified and investigated? Are mechanisms in place to investigate alleged abuses?

b) Domestic law

Day-to-day policing practice is primarily shaped by national laws and internal police regulations. Relevant measures include constitutional provisions protecting freedom of assembly, public order or policing legislation that governs when assemblies may be dispersed and which weapons are authorised, standard operating procedures (SOPs) and police manuals, case law interpreting constitutional and legislative provisions, and the work of oversight bodies tasked with investigating incidents of police misconduct.

For monitors, a crucial step is to identify and collect all relevant domestic laws, regulations, and protocols governing the policing of assemblies and compare these with international and regional standards. This analysis forms the basis for advocacy, including calls for greater transparency (for example, publication of use of force protocols) or for the prohibition of inherently abusive equipment. Monitors should also familiarise themselves with the procedures available in their country for seeking justice and redress in cases of misuse of force.

To begin with monitors should consider what information is already publicly available. Many States publish their laws and regulations online. Where they are not easily accessible, resources such as [The Constitute Project](#) provide access to constitutional provisions of dozens of countries, while the [policinglaw.info](#) website contains information on national legal regimes governing the use of force by law enforcement officials worldwide.

Where Freedom of Information (FOI) regimes exist, they can be a powerful tool for obtaining otherwise inaccessible information on policing processes, such as SOPs, training materials or internal complaint procedures. [FreedomInfo.org](#) is a useful resource on freedom of information laws, offering country profiles, legal updates, and practical tools for those who wish to make FOI requests. Where no FOI law exists, documenting the lack of access itself can support advocacy for legal reform.

By comparing national legal frameworks with international and regional standards, organisations can expose weaknesses in domestic law. At the same time, it is important to recognise that sometimes domestic rules may appear adequate on paper but fail to meet international obligations in practice. As such, monitoring how laws are actually implemented is just as important as analysing their contents.

2.2 IDENTIFY THE EQUIPMENT USED

The specific weapons and equipment used by police and other security forces at protests can vary widely depending on the weapons held by the local law enforcement agencies and what is specifically authorised for use at public assemblies.

For monitors, it is vital to know what weapons and equipment are available to police in the countries where they work. This knowledge can help monitors to anticipate what may be deployed at protests, and in turn, what type of misuse to watch for and document.



© Studio Incendo. Hong Kong police fired tear gas to disperse crowds during a 2019 pro-democracy protest.

a) Official documents (laws, manuals, and protocols)

Official government and law enforcement documents may provide details of what types of equipment are permitted to be used.

Most countries have laws or regulations governing police use of force, and these sometimes include lists of authorised weapons police training manuals that are publicly available or obtainable through freedom of information requests (FOIs) are another useful resource. Training manuals or operational handbooks often describe standard issue equipment and the conditions for its use. Parliamentary reports or official inquiries into policing can provide insights into the types of equipment used by police; for example, the findings of an investigation into the police response to a protest might list what weapons were deployed.

Gathering these documents allows monitors to begin building an inventory of what the police are authorised to use. With this knowledge you will then be able to observe any discrepancies, for example, if certain weapons are not mentioned in law but appear on the streets, that might indicate unauthorised use. If relevant official documents exist but are not publicly accessible, then monitors should call for them to be published.

b) Public procurement and press releases

Official government procurement portals might list tenders and contracts for law enforcement equipment. These records can reveal not only what type of equipment is being bought, but also the model or supplier, which can then be further researched for detailed specifications.

Press releases or news articles either from government or law enforcement agencies or in some cases equipment manufacturer/suppliers, might announce that the police have obtained new equipment (for example, “Ministry of Interior announces purchase of 500 tear gas launchers from Company X” or “Government unveils new water cannons for crowd control”).

Checking these sources regularly can alert monitors to new weaponry before it is used on the streets. Procurement information is also useful for advocacy: if you know that your government is considering introducing a new type of weapon, you can mobilise to question or oppose it.

c) Online research and open sources

Online open-source research can complement official information. This includes systematically searching news articles, academic studies, human rights reports, and social media posts for references to police weapons and equipment used in your country.

When force is used at protests or public gatherings, local – and sometimes international – media may report on the events. Such coverage can include descriptions of the weapons deployed or even images showing the equipment being carried or used by police.

Academic institutions and specialised NGOs such as Omega Research Foundation, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, regularly publish detailed reports and datasets on the trade and use of law enforcement equipment. Staying in contact with these organisations can be useful, as many are willing to answer questions or assist other monitors to identify unfamiliar weapons or discover which companies have supplied to a country in the past.² Building on this existing research saves time. You may also wish to contribute back by sharing any new findings with these organisations.

NPM reports are another valuable source of information. These reports present the findings and analysis of NPMs following monitoring visits to places of detention or observations of situations such as public assemblies. While not all reports are made public, those that are - particularly when focused on policing, police custody, or protests - can provide important insights into the misuse of law enforcement equipment and violations of the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality in the use of force. They can also offer detailed information on the specific types of equipment and tools employed by law enforcement officials.

Social media platforms are another important source of information. Activists and journalists attending protests frequently post images and videos of police operations that can be analysed to identify weapons. Law enforcement agencies themselves sometimes also post material, including images or videos of training exercises or the introduction of new equipment.

² Requests for information or for assistance to identify weapons can be submitted to the Omega Research Foundation by emailing info@omegaresearchfoundation.org



© Akemi Homura CC 4.0. An N225 tear gas shell displaying identifiable markings, which can help determine the device's type, characteristics, and origin.

d) Documentation during assemblies

One of the most direct ways to identify equipment is through in-person monitoring during protests. When it is safe to do so, trained monitors or protesters can take photos or videos of police equipment, noting markings, colours, and other distinguishing features. Where possible, monitors should try to take these before the assembly has begun, if planned, or at moments when tensions are low to minimise risk. Try to obtain clear, high-quality images; video is often preferable as it provides context and multiple angles.

Used munitions - such as tear gas cartridges, bullet casings, or grenade fragments - can also provide crucial evidence, as they often carry information about the technical specifications of the equipment used (for example, the type of chemical irritant or calibre of a projectile), the manufacturer, or the country of origin. If safe to do so, items should be photographed for later analysis. Collecting used munitions and fragments can be extremely dangerous and can lead authorities to accuse monitors of handling prohibited items. As such, we recommend that you do NOT collect them. If you choose to do so, this should be done with extreme caution (see safety note below). Recording the time, location, and context of use is important, as this can later help investigators to cross-reference evidence and also determine whether the equipment has been misused; for example, tear gas deployed in confined spaces or kinetic impact projectiles fired at close range. When photographing, take shots from several angles, ensure that all markings are legible, and, if you can, include a scale reference or record measurements in your notes.

[eyeWitness to Atrocities](#) is a UK-based NGO that provides a mobile app and secure evidence-management system to capture photos, video, and audio with embedded metadata to create a verifiable chain of custody so footage can be used in investigations or court processes.

If monitors cannot identify the equipment collected or photographed, images and videos can be shared with expert networks who may be able to help. Organisations such as [Omega Research Foundation](#) have databases of images that can be used to help match equipment recorded at a protest with identified weapons³.

If you are unable to attend protests in person, consider collaborating with local journalists or volunteer investigators who will be attending.

When monitoring assemblies, it is important to pay close attention to weapons and equipment designated as inherently abusive in Section 1. Unlike other types of law enforcement equipment, which may have a legitimate and rights-compliant function but which are frequently misused, inherently abusive weapons are inappropriate for law enforcement use in all circumstances. Their presence and use at an assembly can constitute a violation of international standards, regardless of how or when they are deployed. Documenting sightings of such equipment - through photographs, videos, or written notes - should therefore be a priority.

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture's (SRT) Lists of Prohibited and Controlled Equipment

In 2023, the SRT published a thematic study on the trade in tools of torture, including two detailed annexes. One annex lists law enforcement weapons and equipment considered inherently abusive and therefore recommended for prohibition. The other lists equipment that has a legitimate law enforcement purpose but could be misused for torture or ill-treatment and therefore should be subject to strict controls. These annexes provide clear descriptions of the items and the human-rights concerns associated with each. Where the trade and use of specific weapons are not yet regulated nationally, these lists can serve as a useful reference point for advocacy.

All evidence collected during protests serves the dual purpose of helping identify the equipment in use and providing credible evidence to be used for advocacy or legal processes should any misuse take place. As such, it is important to take steps to preserve the chain of custody - record who collected each item, where and when it was found, and how it has been stored. Further detailed guidance on preserving chain of custody and organising and storing evidence from investigations can be found in the [Berkley Protocol](#).

For more in-depth guidance on monitoring assemblies, see [OSCE Handbook on Monitoring Freedom of Peaceful Assembly](#).

³ Requests for assistance with identifying weapons or equipment can be submitted to the Omega Research Foundation by email at info@omegaresearchfoundation.org

Safety Note for Monitors

Never put yourself or others at risk to obtain evidence.

Handling munitions: Some items may still be hot, contain harmful residue, or even remain unexploded. Do not pick up suspicious or intact devices. If collecting fragments, use gloves, avoid inhaling fumes, and place safely in sealed bags.

Recording footage: Monitors should avoid placing themselves between police lines and protesters when tensions are high. Where necessary, be discreet when filming to reduce the risk of targeting or confiscation. Always be cognisant of local laws regarding photographing or filming of police officers.

Sharing images/video: Blur the faces of protesters or bystanders before sharing photos or videos publicly.

Notify authorities: Inform relevant authorities or police liaison officers ahead of protests that human rights monitors will be present.

2.3 IDENTIFYING THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR MISUSE OF EQUIPMENT

Establishing who is responsible for the misuse of force or equipment during protests is critical for ensuring accountability. Analysis of evidence should not only focus on the weapons and equipment used, but also on identifying the law enforcement agencies and individual officers involved.

In some contexts, non-state actors such as militias, paramilitary groups, or other irregular forces may also play a role in the dispersal of demonstrations or inciting violence.⁴ Their involvement - whether acting independently, alongside, or with the consent of State authorities - should be carefully documented.

When monitoring protests in person or when reviewing photos and videos, look for the following:

Insignia and unit markings: Most law enforcement units display distinctive insignia. These can often be seen as patches on uniforms or printed emblems on helmets, shields, or vehicles. Insignia and unit logos are often listed on police agency websites or in official publications.

Identification numbers: Many countries require officers to wear unique identification numbers. These are displayed on the chest, sleeve, shoulders pads, the back of the uniform, or on helmets or other equipment. Vehicle registration numbers and other identifying details on police cars or transport vehicles can also be useful. These numbers can help link individuals to incidents of abuse. If safe to do so, note or photograph these ID numbers. The failure to

⁴ See: [Nicaragua's Ortega and Murillo institutionalize paramilitary groups behind the deaths of over 350 people | International | EL PAÍS English](#), [Iran: Stop using Basij militia to police demonstrations - Amnesty International](#), [India's crackdown in Kashmir: is this the world's first mass blinding? | Kashmir | The Guardian](#)



© Stephen Michalowicz CC 2.0. A police officer in uniform, which displays insignia and other identifiers on the helmet, shoulder pads, sleeves, or chest.

display identification may itself be a breach of international standards or domestic law, so make sure to record if no identifiers are visible.⁵ In some countries, ID numbers can be checked against publicly available databases.

Commanding officers: If possible, pay particular attention to the officers who are giving orders. Under international law, a commanding officer may bear responsibility for the actions of their officers if it can be shown that they knew, or should have known, that law enforcement officials under their command resorted to the unlawful use of force or firearms, and they did not take all measures to prevent, suppress, or investigate such intervention. Commanding officers can often be identified by their position - typically located centrally behind police lines - as well as by rank insignia (stars, stripes, bars, or other symbols), different coloured hats, or other distinctive uniform features. The meanings of these insignia are usually explained on police agency or relevant government ministry websites. If it is possible to identify the agency or unit involved, it is important to verify whether they are authorised by law to use the equipment in question. For example, in some countries certain less lethal weapons may only be lawfully carried by specialised riot control units. If an agency is observed deploying equipment outside of its authorised scope, this strengthens evidence of unlawful use.

5 The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) has underlined that the wearing of visible identification numbers or names on law enforcement uniforms represents a key safeguard against ill-treatment and the fight against impunity (para. 21). In the same vein, the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) often reminds States that they should pass legislation and enforce requirements for every officer on duty to wear visible identification (para. 40). General Comment no. 37 of the Human Rights Committee (para. 89), states that 'to enhance effective accountability, uniformed law enforcement officials should always display an easily recognizable form of identification during assemblies'.

2.4 DOCUMENT THE HARMS CAUSED

When law enforcement weapons are misused, the consequences can be devastating. Protesters or bystanders can be left with serious or life-changing injuries, permanent disabilities, or psychological trauma. In some cases, use of force at protests can kill. Carefully documenting these harms is critical to provide the evidence needed to challenge these abuses, advocate for reform, and support accountability and justice.

Personal testimonies can be a powerful means of conveying the human impact of police violence and mobilising public attention, but these must also be complemented by systematic and rigorous documentation of the harms caused. Detailed and impartial records of injuries, deaths, and psychological effects - collected methodically and with respect for the dignity of the victims and survivors of abuse - can not only strengthen the case for reform but also provide critical evidence for any future legal proceedings.

a) Medico-legal reports

There are already a number of detailed resources that set out good practice for documenting harms. The [Istanbul Protocol](#), for example, provides comprehensive guidance for investigating, documenting, and reporting on torture and other ill-treatment - including recording injuries sustained by survivors - much of which is directly relevant to cases of police violence during protests. In particular, the Protocol emphasises the importance of compiling medico-legal reports, structured documents that set out medical findings linked to incidents of alleged ill-treatment. Ideally, such reports should be based on a full clinical examination carried out by qualified health professionals. If compiled in accordance with the standards set out in the Protocol these formal reports can carry considerable evidentiary weight in judicial proceedings.

In the context of police violence at protests, however, survivors may not have immediate or safe access to independent doctors or forensic specialists. In such cases, monitors can still play a valuable role by recording details of the case and - with consent - photographing injuries. Although this kind of documentation cannot replace formal medico-legal reports, it can provide important initial evidence to support advocacy or assist medical or legal professionals who may become involved later.

To ensure this information is useful, incidents should be documented in a structured and systematic way. Using standardised forms - such as those set out in the [Istanbul Protocol](#) or the [IRCT Protest Toolkit](#) - can ensure that key information is captured consistently, making it easier to identify patterns of harm and to combine or compare data across cases. Interviews with survivors should also be carried out in a manner consistent with the [Méndez Principles on Effective Interviewing](#). Avoiding asking leading questions and instead allowing the survivor to describe events in their own words. Open-ended questions, such as 'explain to me,' 'tell me' or 'describe,' reduce the risk of contaminating the interviewee's memory of the incident and are more likely to illicit more detailed accounts.

All incident reports should try to record as much information as possible, including:

- **Personal details:** Record information including name, age, ethnicity, pre-existing medical conditions or disabilities of the injured person. These can be anonymised if necessary for safety.
- **Details of the incident:** Record a clear, chronological account of what happened, noting when, where and how force was used. A structured timeline makes it easier to reconstruct the sequence of events and to cross-check the account with other evidence such as video footage or witness statements. Where possible, also note the type of weapon believed to have caused the injury – including details such as the type of chemical irritant, calibre, or material of the projectile used.
- **Description of injuries:** Record details of injuries, including their location, size, shape, colour, and any changes over time. Try to give as much detail as possible and avoid vague terms. For example, “*circular bruise, 4 cm diameter, dark purple, on outer left thigh*” rather than “*bruise on leg.*”. When taken carefully, photographs can provide some of the most compelling evidence of the misuse of force and injuries in ways written notes cannot (see box text for practical guidance). Use of body diagrams such as those provided in the Istanbul Protocol are another useful complement to written descriptions, allowing monitors to mark injury locations and link them to numbered photographs. This creates a clear map of injuries, particularly when multiple wounds are present.
- **Medical treatment received:** Note whether the person has attended hospital or received medical treatment for the injuries and what treatment was given. With consent, copies of medical reports, scans, or prescriptions should be collected and stored securely.

In addition to medical evidence, it is often valuable to seek expert analysis from weapons or munitions specialists who can provide important insights into how, and in what context, a weapon may have been used. Technical experts - such as ballistics specialists or acoustic engineers - can offer independent assessments of how a weapon operates and the effects it produces. Their testimony might demonstrate, for example, that a particular pattern of injuries could only have resulted from rubber bullets being fired at close range, in violation of international standards. Such analysis may later be useful in helping courts to determine whether police actions exceeded what could reasonably be considered necessary or proportionate. This can be vital since necessity and proportionality are often the grounds on which governments seek to defend themselves.

Because documentation of harm is highly sensitive, it must be handled with strict confidentiality. Records should be anonymised where possible, stored securely in a way that prevents unauthorised disclosure. Procedures for maintaining a clear chain of custody are also essential to ensure that any evidence collected remains credible in later investigations or legal proceedings.



© Physicians for Human Rights. When photographing injuries close up, include a scale to accurately show their size.

Photographing Injuries

Consent: The injured person should understand why photos are being taken, how they will be stored, and who will see them. Consent should be documented.

Angles and focal length: Each injury should be photographed from various angles and a range of focal lengths to ensure that all details are accurately captured. Close-up photographs can show details of injuries including colour and shape of cuts or bruises. Wider shots showing the injury in the context of part or all of the person's body help to demonstrate the location of the injury or pattern of injuries on the body as a whole. It is especially important to capture at least one image that shows both the injury and the person's face as proof of identification.

Scale: Place a ruler or a common object of known size (such as a coin) next to the injury – to demonstrate the size of the wound. The scale must be on the same plane as the injury to avoid distortion.

Lighting: Use daylight or bright artificial light to ensure sharp and focused images and avoid colour distortions.

Timing: Injuries can evolve, for example, bruises can darken or spread over hours and days. Take photos as soon as possible after the incident and then where feasible follow up 24–48 hours later and then again after several days. Each image should be labelled with the date and time taken.

Integrity: Always preserve original files. Do not crop, filter, or edit photos in ways that could undermine their authenticity or evidentiary value.

For further guidance, see [Physicians for Human Rights' Basic Guidelines for Taking Forensic Photographs of Physical Injuries and Wounds](#)

Survivor-Centred Advocacy

Survivors are more than sources of evidence - they are people who have suffered harm and may still face risks. As such, it is essential to place survivors at the centre of efforts to document the violence perpetrated against them.

Consent: Survivors must understand why information is being collected, how it will be used, and be free to decline or withdraw at any stage. Consent must be an on-going process and not a one-off signature.

Avoid further harm: Sensitive questioning and use of private settings, can help to reduce the risk of further distress.

Safety and dignity: Survivors should control how their experiences are shared, including the option to remain anonymous. The safety and dignity of survivors should be the primary consideration in about whether testimonies, images, or personal details are made public.

Empowerment and support: Survivors should have a voice in shaping how their stories are used and be offered referrals to medical, psychological, or legal support if needed.

3. CHALLENGING MISUSE: TURNING EVIDENCE INTO ACTION

Once evidence of misuse has been collected, the next step is to ensure that it is put to effective use. Documentation alone will not stop abusive practices unless it is connected to wider strategies that seek justice for victims, hold perpetrators to account, restrict the flow of abusive equipment, and raise public awareness. This section sets out practical ways in which monitors can act on the evidence they gather by supporting legal processes to achieve justice and reparation, by campaigning to stop the trade in torture tools, and by mobilising public support to demand change. Taken together, these strategies can help translate monitoring and documentation into meaningful reforms that protect the right to protest and prevent future abuse.

3.1 SUPPORT EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE

Legal action is a crucial tool for challenging the misuse of force by law enforcement during protests. It can deliver remedies to victims and ensure accountability for perpetrators and could achieve impact beyond the individual case by establishing legal precedents that strengthen protections for protesters in the future.

Monitors play a pivotal role in supporting victims of excessive force seek accountability and redress. This includes preparing and strengthening the evidence needed for legal action and helping victims to pursue legal avenues for justice.

a) Prepare evidence for litigation

In the context of legal proceedings, the primary task of an investigation is to gather as much information that is relevant, authentic, and probative. The specific requirements for evidence, including data collection and handling, will depend on the type of proceeding and will be set out in the court's rules of procedure and evidence. Common sources of evidence include victim and witness testimony, medico-legal and other forensic reports, expert opinions, official records, media outputs (videos, photographs, press articles), and secondary materials from CSOs, UN mechanisms, and State human-rights reporting.

Regardless of the specific evidentiary requirements, certain preparation and handling practices will improve the quality and admissibility of your evidence.

- For each item, maintain a chain-of-custody log (who handled it, when, where it was stored, and any transfers) to provide a clear record from collection to hearing.
- Assign a unique ID, apply a clear label, and record basic metadata (date, place, and source/author if known); for digital items, attach brief technical notes on how and when the file was captured or downloaded.
- Preserve an untouched original ("evidentiary copy") and conduct all review on a separate working copy. Record any changes, including the act of copying.
- Store material securely with restricted access, and back up digital files using the "3-2-1" rule (three copies, two different storage types, one off-site).

For more guidance on storing and processing evidence from human rights investigations, see the [Berkley Protocol](#).

b) Identify mechanisms for justice

Once you have collected and prepared your evidence, the next step is to consider which of the potential avenues of justice are most appropriate to the case. Monitors should take a broad view of any potential legal claim, from local courts to international human rights bodies, and be prepared to pursue multiple paths if necessary in order to hold perpetrators accountable.

Efforts to achieve justice should focus on both remedy for victims, such as compensation or rehabilitation, as well as accountability for offenders. In addition, in certain cases, it may also be feasible to achieve results which go beyond the specifics of the case, like policy or law reforms to prevent future abuse.

The misuse of police weapons and equipment at protests may constitute the violation of one or more fundamental rights which make it appropriate to seek legal redress. In cases where police use of less lethal weapons inflicts severe pain and suffering, it may qualify as torture or ill-treatment under national criminal laws and international treaties such as the UN Convention Against Torture. Even in cases that don't meet the strict definition of torture, victims can claim excessive force as a breach of the right to bodily integrity and dignity. Other legal grounds include, violations of the right to life (if deaths occurred or life-threatening injuries were caused), the right to freedom of peaceful assembly (when authorities have unjustifiably disrupted protests with force), the right to integrity (if protestors were arbitrarily detained), and the right to expression (if violence was used to silence dissent).

National mechanisms

Many international bodies require domestic avenues of justice to be exhausted before accepting complaints or petitions. As such, wherever possible, monitors should initially assist victims to seek remedy through their own country's legal system, while documenting any obstacles that could justify an exhaustion exception later.

If a specific officer can be identified as the perpetrator, or if a commanding officer can be shown responsible for the actions of the officers under their command, a criminal complaint should be lodged to instigate an independent investigation aimed at establishing the facts and enabling a prosecution under assault, abuse-of-authority, or anti-torture provisions.

Case Study: Dilan Cruz, Colombia

On 23 November 2019, 17-year-old school student Dilan Cruz was wounded by a 12-gauge beanbang projectile which struck the back of his head when fired from a few metres away. He died two days later from the penetrating wound and head trauma.

The case became significant in the Colombian national debate on the use of less lethal weapons. In 2020, multiple victims filed a writ of protection alleging violations of their fundamental rights to life, integrity, and the right to protest and public demonstration. The Supreme Court of Justice ruled in their favour, ordering the Colombian State to take measures to prevent the violent and widespread use of less lethal weapons. Among its orders was the suspension of 12-gauge shotguns until the Constitutional Court could confirm adequate guarantees for their responsible and proportionate use.

Cruz's relatives and their representatives, the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners, also initiated strategic litigation to ensure the case would not be heard by the Military Criminal Justice System. As a result, the Constitutional Court issued ruling SU-190 of 2021, establishing that when there are evidentiary doubts about the link between official duties and the alleged crime, the case must be heard by the ordinary courts. The case is currently in the investigation phase in the ordinary justice system.

In some contexts, strategic civil litigation or constitutional litigation may also be an effective strategy. Victims may bring lawsuits seeking reparation for injuries or trauma that both provide compensation for the harms caused and also subject police practices to public and judicial scrutiny. Procedural rules vary by jurisdiction, but the burden of proof in civil claims is generally lower than in criminal cases. In some systems civil claims are joined to criminal proceedings and may be stayed pending the criminal case.

Importantly, monitors should remember that legal action isn't only reactive, it can also be preventative. In advance of major demonstrations, organisations have sought injunctions and court orders to limit the force that police can use. A court might be asked to ban particularly dangerous weapons from being deployed at a planned peaceful rally, or to require authorities to adhere to specific crowd-control guidelines.

Engaging with NHRIs - like ombudspersons or human rights commissions - is another possible avenue. These bodies can investigate, make recommendations, or even initiate legal actions in some jurisdictions.

International and regional mechanisms

After exhausting domestic criminal proceedings, monitors should explore available regional and international avenues for justice and reparations. These typically require that domestic judicial remedies have been exhausted, unless it can be shown that these were not available, were ineffective, or that there were undue delays. The specific choice of forum for a human rights claim can depend on a variety of factors, including the type of violation, geographical location of the violation, treaty ratification status of the country in which the violation occurred, admissibility criteria, speed of the proceedings, and the success of past similar cases. Currently, there are human rights mechanisms within the UN system, and regional human rights mechanisms for the African, American, and European continents, which are able to hear individual complaints against States, but no such mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region.

Globally, United Nations treaty bodies provide several channels through which victims of torture can submit complaints. Complaints can only be filed once all domestic remedies have been exhausted and only when the State party has ratified the relevant treaty and accepted the competence of the treaty body in question to review individual complaints. Victims may submit individual complaints to UN treaty bodies, including the Human Rights Committee (HRC) and the Committee against Torture (CAT). NPMs can submit reports on a specific situation of concern, such as the violent repression of a social protest, before The Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT). They can also bring such issues to the attention of the CAT through a formal submission to the Committee in view of a country's examination before the treaty body. The Human Rights Committee (HRC) is an expert body responsible for monitoring States Parties' compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The HRC considers individual communications from States that are party to the ICCPR and have ratified the Optional Protocol. The CAT is composed of independent experts and may examine individual complaints where the State has ratified UNCAT and recognised the Committee's jurisdiction under Article 22. The current status of each country can be checked [here](#).

Case Study: Đorović and Others v. Serbia.

In a recent example of preventative action, Serbian activists and CSOs raised concerns about the authorities' apparent use of an acoustic weapon to disperse crowds during a large anti-government protest in 2025. Concerned that the device would be used during future demonstrations, they gathered expert evidence on the weapons effects and filed an urgent application in with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The Court responded by granting an interim measure ordering Serbia to refrain from using "sonic weapons" for crowd control and to conduct an "effective investigation into the allegations that a sonic weapon had been used". This unprecedented step prevented further use of the device, demonstrating the power of regional courts to impose immediate and effective constraints on policing practices when public safety is at risk.

Monitors can also submit urgent appeals to UN mandates such as the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, or the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, which are able to receive information and make urgent appeals to States in relation to individuals at risk of violations or communicate with States regarding past violations. National remedies do not need to be exhausted for information to be submitted to Special Procedures, and while special rapporteurs cannot impose penalties, their interventions can pressure authorities to investigate abuses or change policies.

At the regional level, several human rights courts and commissions have been active in addressing misuse of force at protests. These bodies can receive petitions from individuals and CSOs alleging that a State has breached its human rights obligations. Regional systems often have the advantage of being able to issue binding judgments or decisions, which can include orders for the government to pay compensation, prosecute offenders, or change policies. They may also grant provisional or interim measures in urgent cases to prevent harm. Monitors should be prepared to support victims in drafting petitions and preparing the evidence they have gathered to meet the bodies' admissibility and proof requirements.

In Africa, cases of torture can be filed before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACtHPR), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice. Under its protection mandate, the ACHPR can accept complaints from individuals, CSOs, and groups of individuals who believe their rights have been violated under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter). The ACtHPR has jurisdiction to hear cases involving torture and other human rights violations in relation to the 30 African States that have ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on the Establishment of the Court. However, only the ACHPR can refer cases to the ACtHPR. Additionally, six States (Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, and Tunisia) have authorised the ACtHPR to hear complaints submitted directly by individuals or NGOs with observer status before the ACHPR. The ECOWAS Court of Justice has competence to hear individual complaints of alleged human rights violations, including rights deriving from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter, and the ICCPR. However, only individuals whose countries are members of the ECOWAS can file a complaint within the Court (a list of current members is available [here](#)).

Case Study: Lekki Toll Gate, ECOWAS Court of Justice

Following the 20th October 2020 shooting of unarmed EndSARS protesters at Lagos's Lekki Toll Gate, three survivors, supported by Nigerian civil society groups, brought a case before the ECOWAS Court of Justice. On 10th July 2024, the Court found Nigeria responsible for multiple violations - including the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, the right to life, and the freedoms of expression, assembly and association. The Court accepted evidence that the applicants suffered physical, mental, emotional and psychological torture, arising from disproportionate use of force by security forces. It ordered Nigeria to conduct a new investigation and to pay compensation to each applicant. The [judgment](#) demonstrates how regional courts can affirm protesters' rights and demand accountability even when domestic legal processes stall.

In Europe, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) can rule on allegations relating to the violation of the rights and freedoms established in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR)⁶. Applications can be made by individuals, CSOs, or States. In order for the Court to rule, the State of the applicant must have ratified the ECHR before the violation occurred.

In the Americas, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAComHR) operates within the framework of the Organisation of American States (OAS). It considers petitions submitted by individuals or CSOs alleging violations of rights protected by the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), and other Inter-American human rights treaties, including the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture. The IAComHR examines alleged violations of the ACHR only with respect to States that have [ratified that Convention](#). For other OAS member states, petitioners may invoke rights under the American Declaration, and they may also allege breaches of other OAS human rights treaties to the extent the State has ratified them. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) may hear cases only against ACHR States Parties that have accepted its jurisdiction. Individuals cannot apply to the IACtHR directly, instead cases must first be brought to the IAComHR, which then decides whether to refer them to the Court⁷.

Legal arguments and strategies that succeed in one jurisdiction can often be adapted elsewhere. As such, when pursuing legal action at the national, regional, or international level, monitors should endeavour to share their experiences and lessons learned with other human rights organisations. Since the repression of protests through the misuse of law enforcement weapons and equipment is a global problem, success in one case can provide a practical template that others can follow.

3.2 STOP THE TRADE IN TOOLS OF TORTURE

As described in Section 1, human rights abuses at protests are often committed by police using specialised weapons. One strategy to prevent such abuses occurring, therefore, is to campaign to block the import, procurement and deployment of inherently abusive weapons and equipment and to ensure that any other law enforcement weapons are rigorously tested and proven fit for purpose prior to use.

Using the evidence gathered on the equipment used in their country as well as their knowledge of national trade controls, monitors can pursue several strategies to promote the use of more human rights-compliant policing and the phasing out of weapons associated with unlawful force.

6 Detailed guidance on the European Convention of Human Rights can be accessed [here](#). See Guide on Article 2 and Article 3 for guidance on the right to life and prohibition of torture respectively.

7 A guide to the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on cases involving the excessive use of force can be accessed here: [Cuadernillos de Jurisprudencia de la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos](#)

a) Strengthen Domestic Trade Controls

The manufacture of law enforcement weapons and equipment is typically concentrated in a small number of States. As such, if a country is not a major manufacturer of weapons, then it is highly likely that some or all of the equipment used by law enforcement agencies will have been imported. One strategy to prevent the use of inherently abusive equipment is therefore to lobby for stronger trade controls to prevent the import of such weapons.

Where no such trade controls exist – or existing laws are weak – civil society, including monitors, can campaign to introduce or strengthen national legislation, using established international standards as a model. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture's 2023 list of law enforcement weapons and devices that should be banned and the EU Anti-Torture Regulation offer both useful points of reference and examples of good practice which CSOs and other monitors can use to advocate for reform.

If relevant trade controls already exist, but appear to be poorly implemented, then attention should shift to enforcement. Use evidence gathered to clearly demonstrate how the standards are not being met in practice (e.g. the acquisition or use of prohibited items). Monitors can also advocate for measures to improve enforcement of existing controls including stronger penalties for violators, adequate resources and training for customs and licensing officials responsible for identifying and halting illicit shipments, as well as greater transparency and public reporting of relevant import statistics and reasons for licence denials to enable independent scrutiny.

b) Supporting Regional and International Trade Controls

Depending on the country, monitors may also have opportunities to advocate for stronger controls at a regional level. Regional trade agreements can raise standards across multiple States as well as create external pressure for domestic reform. Currently there are several regional processes working towards greater control of the trade in law enforcement weapons and equipment at different stages, including at the [Council of Europe](#), [European Union](#), and [African Union](#).

Where such initiatives exist or are emerging, monitors can support them by sharing any evidence of misuse gathered through briefings or submissions to regional bodies or by engaging in public consultations to ensure that new regulations address the specific weapons and patterns of abuse documented.

At the global level, support is also growing for a legally binding torture-free trade instrument that would prohibit promotion and trade of inherently abusive equipment and require human rights-based controls on other law enforcement goods. Since 2017, the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade - a coalition of 63 states launched by Argentina, the European Union, and Mongolia - has been a key organising forum for governments to coordinate actions to address the trade. In June 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted [Resolution 73/304](#) Towards torture-free trade: examining the feasibility scope and parameters for possible common international standards. This was followed by a UN Secretary-General's report ([A/74/969, 2020](#)) and a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) report (2022), which recognised both the importance and feasibility of prohibiting inherently abusive equipment and regulating the trade in law enforcement equipment that could be misused for torture and other ill-treatment. As noted above, in 2023, the UN Special

Rapporteur on torture also published a thematic study on the trade in law enforcement equipment in which she outlined the need for a legally binding international torture-free trade instrument.

As a monitor you can press your own government to publicly support the UN process by encouraging them to join the [Alliance for Torture-Free Trade](#) if they haven't already done so, or to vote in favour of UN resolutions on this topic. Monitors can also show their own support by joining [the Torture-Free Trade Network](#) - a coalition of over 80 CSOs campaigning for an international, legally-binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty, and by signing the Network's [Shoreditch Declaration](#) calling for a Treaty. The Network meets regularly to plan the campaign, share resources and information, and build relationships between member organisations.

c) Collaborating Across Borders

Where the prospects for strengthening domestic trade controls are limited, an alternative strategy is to focus on stopping the flow of inherently abusive equipment at its source. If the evidence that you have gathered suggests that specific weapons or equipment have been imported, then monitors should attempt to work with organisations in the country of origin, who may be able to engage with relevant export-control authorities. Sharing the evidence you have gathered can help partner organisations build a convincing evidence-led campaign that can potentially secure licence suspensions or denials or generate public scrutiny that might prompt companies to cease future transfers. This approach is especially effective if the exporting country has well-established export controls over the export of law enforcement equipment.



An N225 Rubber Bursting CS Grenade used during the 2019 Hong Kong protests was found to be manufactured by a UK company.

Case Study: UK suspends exports of tear gas to Hong Kong, 2019

During protests in Hong Kong in 2019, information and images of equipment posted online by protestors and local groups were identified by the Omega Research Foundation as being manufactured in the UK. This information was then used to successfully pressure the UK government to suspend exports of less lethal weapons to Hong Kong.

d) Promoting Corporate Responsibility

Another strategy to prevent the import of inherently abusive equipment is to target the companies responsible for manufacturing and supplying these weapons. In some jurisdictions, companies are bound by explicit human rights obligations; for example, under the [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#), businesses from OECD Member countries are expected to respect human rights throughout their operations. This framework provides a mechanism for monitors to challenge suppliers of inherently abusive equipment by filing complaints against companies. If monitors have identified a particular manufacturer and documented how their equipment was used to commit abuses, they can pursue an OECD complaint to seek remedy. To do this, monitors can submit a complaint (known as a “specific instance”) to the OECD National Contact Point (NCP) - the government offices that implement the Guidelines - in the company’s home country. Exact procedure for handling complaints may vary slightly between NCPs, so check the requirements with the relevant NCP before making a submission. While the OECD process does not impose penalties like a court, the findings that the process produces can raise awareness and help to promote better business practices in future.

Alongside this, UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights also play a key role in promoting corporate accountability for human rights abuses. The Working Group monitors how States and companies implement the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(UNGPs\)](#) and has recently endorsed [a statement](#) by the Special Rapporteur on torture calling for an international agreement addressing the trade in inherently abusive law enforcement equipment and other goods that can be misused to torture. Monitors can submit information about specific companies or incidents of abuse, which may be included in thematic reports and can lead to public statements or recommendations to States.

Even without using formal mechanisms, highlighting links between companies and specific incidents of abuse can be an effective strategy. Companies are highly sensitive to reputational damage and investor sentiment, and may reconsider transfers to avoid negative publicity or shareholder scrutiny. For example, monitors could consider launching an evidence-led public campaign that names the company and clearly demonstrates its links to the abuses documented. Monitors might also consider collaborating with journalists who can investigate the company further or help to amplify the story.

When naming specific companies, ensure that every claim is supported by evidence, avoid unsupported inferences and clearly state any areas of uncertainty. It is essential to follow rigorous documentation practices and preserve the chain of custody. Depending on the seriousness

of the allegations - particularly where illegal activities are alleged - seek legal review before publication. Monitors should also endeavour to contact the companies concerned in advance, share the evidence, and notify them of the intended claims. This provides a right of reply to the company and an opportunity to correct errors, therefore minimising the risk of legal action.

Case Study: Forensic Architecture – Safariland Triple Chaser

In 2019, Forensic Architecture launched Triple-Chaser, a video-led investigation that trained computer-vision models to detect Safariland’s “Triple-Chaser” tear gas grenades in photographs from protests.

The project was produced in response to the organisation’s invitation to the 2019 Whitney Biennial and the mounting controversy over Whitney trustee Warren B. Kanders’ ties to Safariland.

Amid scrutiny of the Whitney Museum and its board, Forensic Architecture and several other artists withdrew their works. Shortly after, Kanders resigned from his position on the Whitney’s board, after which Forensic Architecture and the other artists rescinded their withdrawal.

During renewed scrutiny in 2020, amidst the use of the Triple-Chaser grenade by police against Black Lives Matter activists, Kanders announced that he would divest his company of divisions selling chemical irritants.

This case illustrates how a targeted and evidence-led investigations combined with public and media pressure, can impose reputational costs on companies which can have real impacts on business practices.

e) Strengthening Procurement Processes and Oversight

In some countries, the challenge is not imported equipment, but weapons that have been manufactured and procured domestically. If your country has a well-established arms or security industry, law enforcement agencies will likely procure the majority of their equipment from local manufacturers and suppliers. In such circumstance, efforts to strengthen import controls may be less effective, and your efforts and advocacy should instead focus on the procurement and approval processes for law enforcement equipment.

Monitors can use evidence of the misuse of similar equipment in other contexts to advocate for thorough testing and evaluation of all law enforcement equipment before it is acquired and issued to officers, as well as for periodic reviews of its continued use. These assessments should combine independent ballistic testing with medical evaluation to determine the potential risk of injuries. The objective of this testing is to demonstrate that the equipment is fit for purpose and capable of being used in a human rights-compliant way. If testing shows that a weapon is inherently inaccurate or prone to causing excessive injury, it should not be considered for purchase.



© Forensic Architecture. Forensic Architecture used artificial intelligence to identify tear gas grenades at protests.

When advocating for thorough testing, it may be helpful to reference established international technical standards on the safe design of less lethal weapons. For example, the United Nations [*Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement*](#) (2020) sets benchmarks for acceptable performance of law enforcement weapons, including that kinetic impact projectiles must be accurate enough to strike a target within a 10-centimetre diameter of the intended point of aim at the recommended range. More broadly, the Special Rapporteur on Torture's list of inherently abusive weapons, again provides a useful point of reference for identifying equipment that should be rejected outright by law enforcement agencies.

It is important to also advocate for the periodic re-evaluation of equipment already in use, especially after incidents involving serious injuries or deaths. If evidence gathered demonstrates a pattern of misuse or injuries resulting from the use of a specific item of equipment, monitors should demand that authorities suspend its use pending evaluation and testing. There have already been notable examples of successes in this area achieved by monitors who have identified specific items of concern and focussed their advocacy on forcing the removal of those weapons.

Case study: Withdrawal of foam projectiles in Catalonia

In February 2021, a young woman lost an eye after being struck by a foam projectile fired by an officer of the Mossos d'Esquadra. An independent technical report compiled by the Omega Research Foundation reviewed the use of force protocol governing the projectiles deployment and found that it was inconsistent with the manufacturer's own safety recommendations. While the manufacturer warned that firing the projectile at distances under 30m could cause very serious injuries, the protocol provided a lower "safe" minimum of 20m . The projectile in this incident was fired from approximately 22m - 8m below the manufacturer's guidance yet within the distance permitted by the protocol.

In 2023, following sustained advocacy and calls for accountability from Irídia and other CSOs, the General Directorate of Police committed to withdraw the projectile. This case demonstrates the importance of scrutiny including independent expert analysis of police use of force protocols in order to ensure their consistency with human rights standards and manufacturer safety guidance.

3.3 ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Direct and constructive engagement with law enforcement agencies can, in some contexts, create pressure for regulatory changes that reduce the risk of the use of excessive or unlawful force at public assemblies. While such engagement may not be possible or appropriate in every country, where the conditions for dialogue exists, this strategy can be effective for advocating for greater transparency and the alignment of national policing practices with international human rights standards.

Firstly, where use of force policies, operational or training manuals, or other relevant documents exist but are not published, monitors and CSOs can encourage law enforcement agencies to make these publicly accessible. Demanding disclosure of such resources is an important first step in enabling scrutiny and building evidence-based arguments for change. Engagement can also focus on reforms to policing practices, for example, ensuring that national protocols reflect international standards, securing explicit restrictions on the types of less lethal weapons which can be used, and advocating for mandatory reporting and proper record-keeping.

In addition to these long term objectives, direct engagement can also be beneficial in the preparation for public assemblies. In some countries, police agencies may invite protest organisers, monitors, or CSOs to pre-assembly liaison meetings. Organisations should consider the risks and benefits of such meetings before participating, as in some contexts such meetings can be used to gather intelligence or to later legitimise police actions. Where participation is considered safe, these meetings can be used to clarify police expectations, understand proposed tactics (including potential deployment of less lethal weapons), and raise specific concerns regarding past misuse of equipment. If appropriate, monitors should also request the designation of a named liaison contact in case urgent communication is required during the protest.

Case Study: Dialogue on police use of less lethal weapons in Colombia, 2023



© ONU Derechos Humanos Colombia. In 2023, ONU Derechos Humanos Colombia facilitated the first dialogue between the Ministry of Defense, the Dialogue and Order Maintenance Unit, and civil society on the use of force and less-lethal weapons during social protests.

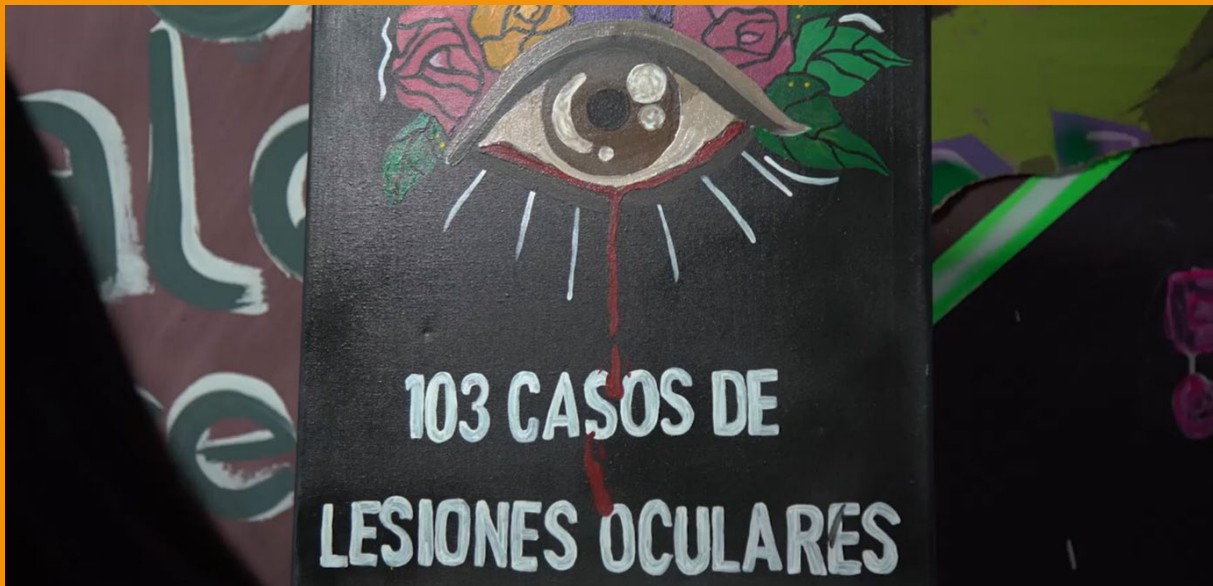
As a result of sustained efforts by victims of police violence and human rights organisations, in 2023, a process was begun to modify the regulations governing the use of less lethal weapons by Colombian police during protests. The process incorporated input from victims and human rights organisations, through eight working group sessions facilitated by the United Nations. In these sessions, victims shared their experiences and measures were proposed to ensure the inclusion of relevant international standards, clarify command responsibility, establish requirements for the registration of weapons and allocation of ammunition, strengthen human rights training, mandate supervision of weapon use, and set explicit prohibitions on the indiscriminate use of less lethal weapons. In 2025, the process culminated in the adoption of Resolution 01840, which introduced the 'Manual on the Use of Weapons, Ammunition, Less Lethal Items and Devices (AML)' for the National Police. This case demonstrates that, when conditions are favourable, direct engagement and dialogue with law enforcement authorities can be one of the most effective routes to securing regulatory change.

3.4 MOBILISE PUBLIC SUPPORT

It is essential to raise wider public awareness of the misuse of force at protests. Rights are at risk when they are not actively defended and public support for protesters and public outrage at violence committed against them, can put pressure on decision-makers to pursue reforms or to support accountability for the perpetrators.

Communicating to the wider public the harms caused by law enforcement weapons and equipment can be challenging, particularly where the issues involved are technical or the effects or implications are not immediately visible. Nevertheless, there are several strategies that monitors can adopt to communicate these harms effectively and to amplify the experiences of survivors.

Case Study: MOCAO, Colombia's Survivors' Movement Against Ocular Injuries



© IRCT/Keiry Movilla Salazar . Screenshot from the video 'Keiry Movilla Salazar, #Colombia: 'We Don't Stay Silent''

The Movimiento en Resistencia contra las Agresiones Oculares del ESMAD (MOCAO) was founded by survivors of serious eye injuries sustained during protests in Colombia. The movement brings together victims, family members, and human rights activists to demand justice, reparation, and non-repetition of such abuses.

MOCAO's work includes documenting ocular trauma in the context of protest policing, collecting survivor testimonies, and working with researchers and the media to highlight the human cost of less lethal weapons used at public assemblies.

Through its work MOCAO has shifted public discourse in Colombia to recognise ocular injury as a distinct dimension of police force misuse, elevated survivor voices in civic and policy spaces, and partnered with academic and civil society actors to build evidence of protest-related eye injuries.

In doing so, MOCAO offers a model for how grassroots organisations can mobilise for reform of protest policing by foregrounding survivors and their stories.

a) Amplify survivor stories

While medico-legal reports and the systematic recording of injuries are essential for building evidence to support legal processes, survivors' testimonies and case studies convey the personal and social impact of abusive policing practices in ways that technical reports cannot. Survivors' accounts can make visible not only physical injuries, but also psychological trauma and the long-term consequences for individuals, families, and communities. These accounts are often more emotive and accessible to the public and can therefore be critical for explaining the harms of police misuse of force to a broader audience.

Because these accounts are deeply personal, they must be gathered and used with care. Survivors should feel safe, respected, and in control of how their experiences are shared (see ‘survivor-centred advocacy’ above). Approached in this way, testimonies can complement formal reporting by raising public awareness, mobilising public opinion, and engaging the media in ways that technical reports and statistics alone cannot. It is essential that any sharing of survivors’ stories - and the publication of any images of survivors or their injuries - is done with their informed and ongoing consent and with clear, prior explanation of how the material will be used.

b) Engage with the media

Working with journalists is an effective way to amplify your message and uplift survivor stories. Newspapers, broadcasters, and news websites often have a far greater reach than monitors and can engage audiences that monitors alone may not be able to reach. When engaging the media, it is important to recognise that many journalists will not be specialists. Monitors should try to distil complex information about equipment, standards, and use of force into clear narratives and simple messages that a non-specialist journalist can understand and then communicate effectively to a wider audience.

At the same time, it is important not to sacrifice accuracy in pursuit of simplicity. To ensure that the information you have gathered is reported accurately, monitors should try to:

- **Clearly indicate any areas of uncertainty:** For example, where the identification of a particular company’s product is probable but not conclusive. It might also be helpful to explain the limits of the evidence available, or why you are unable to be conclusive.
- **Be precise about technical and legal details:** Some cases may require an appreciation of technical details (for example, the specific calibre of projectile used) or legal nuances. Where this is the case, make their importance explicit, use accurate terminology, and be precise about technical details to avoid these from being overlooked in the reporting.
- **Ask to approve quotations:** this can help to reduce the risk of misrepresentation.
- **Exercise caution when making claims about specific companies or individuals:** Ensure all claims are supported by evidence and offer a right of reply prior to publication.
- **Avoid jargon:** Explain terms such as “less lethal” clearly using simple language.
- **Prepare a media kit:** A one-page briefing note (key facts, timeline, and quotes), a short case study (with consent), high-resolution images or video with captions and credits, and links to primary evidence (e.g. court documents, expert reports).
- **Anticipate pushback:** You might be asked, for example, questions about proportionality or necessity, so it could be useful to prepare clear, evidence-based responses in advance.

Where interviews are required, invest in media training for key staff and prepare them using Q&As covering the most likely or difficult questions, including challenges on proportionality and necessity.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Documentation tools

eyeWitness to Atrocities. 2025. Available at: <https://www.eyewitness.global/>

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims. 2025. *Protest Toolkit*. Available at: <https://irct.org/protesttoolkit/>.

Information available in: English, French, Arabic, Spanish, Ukrainian, Bengali, Georgian, Russian.

National Committee for the Prevention of Torture of the Argentine Republic (CNPT). 2024. *Guidance for torture prevention mechanisms during public demonstrations*. Available at: <https://cnpt.gob.ar/guia-de-actuacion-para-los-mecanismos-de-prevencion-de-la-tortura-en-manifestaciones-publicas/>

Available in Spanish, English, French, Portuguese.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 2020. *Handbook on Monitoring Freedom of Peaceful Assembly: Second Edition*. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/monitoring-peaceful-assembly>

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Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and Omega Research Foundation. 2021. *Guide on Law Enforcement Equipment Used in the Policing of Assemblies*. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/491551>

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Physicians for Human Rights. 2022. *Basic Guidelines for Taking Forensic Photographs of Physical Injuries and Wounds*. Available at: <https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/PHR-Guidelines-for-Forensic-Photography-March-2022-FINAL.pdf>

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International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations and Physicians for Human Rights. 2023. *Lethal in Disguise 2: How Crowd-Control Weapons Impact Health and Human Rights*. Available at: <https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/REPORT-Lethal-in-Disguise-2-PHR-INCLO-March-2023.pdf>

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Omega Research Foundation. 2025. Available at: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/omega-resources/>

Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa. 2017. *Student Protests: A legal & practical guide*. Available at: https://seri-sa.org/images/Students_rights_guide_FINAL_Nov2017.pdf

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United Against Torture Consortium. 2025. *Protesting Without Fear: A Policy Framework to End Torture and Ill-Treatment in the Context of Protests*. Available at: <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/reports/protesting-without-fear-a-policy-framework-to-end-torture-and-ill-treatment-in-the-context-of-protests/>

Legal resources

Inter-American Court of Human Rights. 2022. *Cuadernillo de Jurisprudencia No. 25: Orden público y uso de la fuerza*. Available at: <https://biblioteca.corteidh.or.cr/adjunto/38987>

European Court of Human Rights. 2025. *Guide on the case-law of the European Convention on Human Rights: Mass Protests*. Available at: <https://ks.echr.coe.int/web/echr-ks/all-case-law-guides>

Available in Arabic, Armenian, English, French, Georgian, Romanian, Turkish, Ukrainian.

The Law on Police Use of Force. 2025. *Law on Police Use of Force Worldwide: Analysis of Domestic Rules on Use of Force by Law Enforcement*. Available at: <https://www.policinglaw.info/>

International and regional systems

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. 2017. *Guidelines for the Policing of Assemblies by Law Enforcement Officials in Africa*. Available at: <https://achpr.au.int/en/soft-law/guidelines-policing-assemblies-law-enforcement-officials-africa>

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Available in the six UN working languages.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2017. *The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016): The Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-executions/minnesota-protocol>

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Available in English, French, Russian, Chinese, Arabic

Original version of the Protocol available in all UN languages here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/istanbul-protocol-manual-effective>

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2023. A/78/324: *Thematic study on the global trade in weapons, equipment and devices used by law enforcement and other public authorities that are capable of inflicting torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78324-thematic-study-global-trade-weapons-equipment-and-devices-used>

Study available in the six UN working languages.

ANNEX 1 – INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL STANDARDS CONCERNING THE USE OF FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AT PROTESTS

Key international standards include:

UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials (1979) - Establishes basic ethical and legal standards for police worldwide.

UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms (1990) - Establishes that non-violent means must be exhausted before force is used and that firearms may only be used when strictly unavoidable to protect life.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): Protects the right to life (Article 6), the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 7), and the right to peaceful assembly (Article 21).

UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT): Reaffirms the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, which applies in all contexts including protests.

UN Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement (2020): Provides detailed guidance on the lawful use of common police weapons such as batons, tear gas, water cannon, and kinetic impact projectiles.

Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests (2024): Offers practical guidance to ‘to enhance the capacity and practices of law enforcement agencies to fulfil their duty to promote and protect human rights in the context of peaceful protests’.

General Comment no. 37 – UN HRC (2020): provides an authoritative interpretation of Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects the right of peaceful assembly.

UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT): establishes an international inspection system for places of detention

Regional standards:

American Convention on Human Rights (Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights): Stresses that firearms must never be used to disperse demonstrations.

European Convention on Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights): Emphasises that any use of force during assemblies must be strictly necessary and proportionate, and that firearms may only be used when absolutely necessary to protect life.

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights)

Guidelines on the Policing of Assemblies (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2017): Adapts global standards to the regional context, setting clear requirements for lawful use of force and restrictions on abusive tactics.



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A protest in Milan that escalated into clashes between protesters and the police.