

Torture Rife in Uzbekistan, UN Watchdog Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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GENEVA — Torture is rife in prisons and police stations in Uzbekistan, where activists are rounded up and routinely mistreated, the United Nations torture watchdog said Friday.

It cited "numerous, ongoing and consistent allegations" that detainees in the ex-Soviet state were tortured, including by rape and sexual violence, in order to extract confessions. Some alleged abuses had resulted in deaths in custody.

The UN Committee Against Torture called on Uzbekistan to carry out prompt, impartial and effective investigations into all allegations of torture and punish those responsible.

The government of President Islam Karimov should report back within a year on its progress in wiping out "widespread torture" and arbitrary imprisonment of human rights defenders and journalists imprisoned in retaliation for their work, it said.

There were also substantiated reports that Uzbek women who had given birth to two or more children, particularly in rural areas, had been "subjected to sterilization procedures without informed consent," according to the UN Watchdog.

Karimov brooks no dissent and has ruled his mainly Muslim Central Asian nation of 30 million for more than two decades.

However, Akmal Saidov, chairman of the National Human Rights Centre of Uzbekistan who led its delegation, said during the watchdog's review that numerous complaints of torture raised were "unfounded."

He accused the committee of being corrupted by information provided by "certain politically biased nongovernmental organizations."

Amnesty International accused Russia, Ukraine and the five Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan, in July of colluding in abductions and unlawful transfers of asylum-seekers and refugees back to Central Asia where they faced the risk of torture. Russian and Uzbek officials were not available for comment at that time.

Referring to Uzbekistan, the committee voiced concern, without elaborating, at "allegations that some individuals extradited from neighboring countries had been subjected to torture and others detained incommunicado."

The UN experts said the International Committee of the Red Cross had halted its prison visits in Uzbekistan in April, leaving an absence of external monitoring. They voiced deep concern at conditions at the Jaslyk detention facility in the north, which some activist groups have named "the House of Torture."

The ICRC, an independent aid agency, had said its terms were not respected, including being able to speak to detainees in private about conditions of detention.

The UN panel also aired allegations it had received that Uzbek detainees were "frequently denied access to a lawyer of their choice independent of state authority."

It said that lawyers in Uzbekistan were not sufficiently independent from the Justice Ministry and that judges were not permitted to assess the legality of detention.

The UN watchdog, composed of 10 independent experts, examined the records of nine countries, including Uzbekistan, during a four-week meeting ending on Friday. It was Uzbekistan's first review since 2007.

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