First Committee Statement 2026, Torture-Free Trade Network

UNGA 81 – First Committee

Torture-Free Trade

15 October 2026

Statement delivered by Payal Shah

***** Check against delivery *****

Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Colleagues,

Torture and other ill-treatment is absolutely prohibited, in all circumstances. Across the world, however, law enforcement equipment is used for torture and other ill-treatment. Protestors, detainees, migrants, and many others have been beaten with batons, forced into painful positions by restraints, blinded by rubber bullets, injured by excessive amounts of tear gas, or tortured with electric shock weapons. At borders, during arrest, in detention, and at public assemblies, globally traded equipment is too often used to violate human rights.

Unless the trade in tools of torture ends, these abuses will keep growing.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of members of the Torture-Free Trade Network - a group of over 85 civil society organizations from every region in the world. Together, we are campaigning for a legally binding treaty to end the global trade of equipment used for torture or other ill-treatment. A Torture-Free Trade Treaty would prohibit inherently abusive equipment that should have no role in policing, and regulate the trade in other law enforcement equipment to ensure it cannot be used to cause harm.

In the last year, momentum to end the trade in tools of torture has continued to grow. We welcome the recent Human Rights Council statement[1] by the Global Alliance for Torture-Free Trade, a group of over 60 countries committed to ending the torture trade, and we urge all Member States to join the Alliance and work collectively toward that aim".

In June, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture published a paper[2] detailing her recommendations for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty. We thank Dr Edwards for her pioneering work and look forward to working with the new mandate-holder, Dr. Pau Pérez, on this issue.

Regional initiatives show growing momentum. As I speak, the Council of Europe is reviewing its torture-free trade instrument, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, through its Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Africa, has continued to work on this subject, including by asking specific questions of states about steps taken with respect to trade and procurement of law enforcement equipment.

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[1] Statement available: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc61-joint-statement-interactive-dialogue-special-rapporteur-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or_en

[2] Paper available: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/sr/srt-tftt-qa-may-2026.pdf

States can also act nationally by adopting new laws or revising existing legislation to implement the Special Rapporteur's recommendations to prohibit the production and trade of inherently abusive goods and control the trade in others that risk misuse.

But while national and regional controls are important, States must begin negotiations for a global legally binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty.

Torture survivors who support establishing a Torture-Free Trade Treaty have said:

"Nobody should have to suffer the pain that we have endured. Torture is designed to break bodies and minds; we bear the long-lasting physical and psychological scars of that cruelty…

If a Torture-Free Trade Treaty would spare even one person the horrors that we have experienced, it is worth any effort that doing so would require."

Thank you.

Statement issued by the following organizations of the Torture-Free Trade Network:

African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF)

Amnesty International

Centre for Human Rights (University of Pretoria)

Centre for the Victims of Torture (CVT)

Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)

Independent Medico-Legal Unit (IMLU)

International Human Rights Clinic - Harvard Law School

International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations (INCLO)

KontraS

Omega Research Foundation

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)

TORTURE-FREE TRADE NETWORK