

Nigeria: #EndSARS campaign should lead to a new police structure that is torture-free

Joint press release

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Prisoners' Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) call for deeper reforms in Nigeria that lead to a policing system complying with the obligations and commitment of the country to end torture within its security forces. The two organisations call for the withdrawal of the military from a purely civil engagement and for allowing Security entities constitutionally mandated to engage and supervise peaceful protests to do so. We also call for a thorough investigation into cases of human rights violations and to ensure that perpetrators account for their actions.

Our organisations strongly condemn the alleged use of excessive and disproportionate force by Nigerian armed forces in Lagos against peaceful protesters on 20th October 2020, in the context of the #EndSars national campaign carried out by the Nigerian population and civil society organisations. According to rights groups, uniformed men opened fire on peaceful protesters, killing 12 people and injuring hundreds of others. In fact, the call to disband the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) echoed a broader need to reform policing, targeting law enforcement institutions.

"It is important to note that the Nigerian populace used the platform of the EndSARS campaign to exhale their frustrations on nagging issues around torture, arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, extortions, and other human rights abuses by Security agents in Nigeria. This outright disregard for the rules of engagement and professionalism by security agents exposes a long culture of torture and lack of accountability by the Nigerian law enforcement and policing apparatus", stated Ogechi Ogu Esq, Deputy Director of PRAWA.

The occurrence of such serious incidents, after the authorities had announced the dissolution of SARS, shows that the reforms needed are more structural and should touch the whole security

apparatus. Our organisations believe that there is a need for broader reforms: reforms of all Specialized Units of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) (there are 11 NPF Specialized Units excluding SARS and the newly established unit, SWAT), the Police, and of other Policing Agencies/Law Enforcement and Security Agencies.

While we condemn the disproportionate use of force on peaceful protesters, we equally condemn the attacks on police stations, correctional centers, private businesses and police officers, as has been witnessed in the past days. The destruction and looting of properties by hoodlums cannot be a response to police brutality.

To assuage the legitimate anger in the land, quick steps should be taken to reduce the excessive power given to the police and military when they are in charge of maintaining order. It is imperative that the judicial panels and the National Human Rights Independent Investigation Panel in charge of investigating the SARS and Other Police Specialized Units set up across the states and at the federal level conduct quick investigations, prosecution and punishment of all identified perpetrators of torture during and before the #EndSars protest. The trial of these persons should be made public and counseling and other support and rehabilitation services should be provided to victims.

"As the United Nations Committee Against Torture will soon review Nigeria, the authorities should be circumspect and place premium attention on compliance with their treaty obligations on torture or, at the very least, respect the recently enacted Anti-Torture Act of 2017, which prohibits torture", affirmed Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General.

In this regard, we call on Nigeria to take concerted actions to implement the Anti-torture Act, 2017 and other relevant laws that promote accountability and human rights protection.

Such a step could prove the best way to win the trust of the protesters and convince them to join discussions with the authorities.

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The World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) is the main global coalition of NGOs fighting torture and ill- treatment, with over 200 members in more than 90 countries. Its international secretariat is based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Prisoners' Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA) is a non-governmental charitable organization established in 1994 in Nigeria that promotes institutional reforms in formal and informal sector for access to justice, rehabilitation, and social development of prisoners, ex-prisoners, torture victim and youth at risk. It has observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.