

Nepal: Protect Protesters and Ensure Accountability

The United Against Torture Consortium (UATC), Advocacy Forum-Nepal, Human Rights and Justice Centre (HRJC), Legal Literacy - Nepal, and Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP) express grave concern at the killing of at least 34 protesters and the injuring of hundreds more during Nepal's crackdown on youth-led demonstrations against corruption and the government's social media ban. The use of live ammunition, tear gas, and rubber bullets against protesters suggest an unlawful and disproportionate response to assemblies and a serious breach of Nepal's obligations under international law, including the absolute prohibition of torture and the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

On 8 September 2025, widespread protests erupted across Nepal, marking the most significant unrest in decades. The demonstrations were primarily youth-led, dubbed the 'Gen Z' movement, and included children among the participants. Demonstrators took to the streets in response to the government's ban on 26 major social media platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, while also protesting widespread corruption, the lack of economic opportunities, shrinking civic space and calling for good governance. While the ban was officially lifted on 9 September and the Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli subsequently resigned, protests continued and the situation further escalated when government buildings were set on fire. In the absence of effective civilian authority, the army has assumed responsibility for maintaining order and is reportedly negotiating with protest organisers to form an interim government.

The government's response, including the use of live ammunition, tear gas, and other weapons against protesters raises serious concerns about compliance with principles on the policing of assemblies. International standards make clear that, even in volatile situations, law enforcement must act on a clear legal basis and ensure any force is necessary and proportionate. [The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials](#) stipulate that force must be strictly necessary and proportionate, that firearms may be used solely in defence against an imminent threat of death or serious injury, and that intentional lethal use is permissible only when unavoidable to protect life. Indiscriminate or excessive use of force violates the right to life and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, as enshrined in Nepal's Constitution, the UN Convention against Torture, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that children's rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and protection from violence, torture and other forms of ill-treatment be guaranteed.

[The Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests](#) makes clear that the role of law enforcement is to facilitate and protect assemblies rather than suppress them, and highlights the importance of negotiation and communication with organisers, alongside a duty to take all possible precautions to prevent escalation. Ensuring effective accountability mechanisms is also central to address violations and prevent recurrence. Where children are present in assemblies, the Protocol recognises that special care must be taken to shield them from

harm, particularly in situations where weapons are used in their proximity. Finally, it calls for civilian-led oversight and monitoring of law enforcement conduct to ensure compliance with human rights obligations.

The same principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality apply when the army is deployed to assist in public order operations. Force should be a last resort, directed only at individuals posing an imminent threat of death or serious injury, and never against peaceful demonstrators. Orders for deployment must come from civilian authorities and military personnel remain fully bound by international human rights law, including the absolute prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Any violations must be promptly and impartially investigated by independent authorities.

We recommend that the government of Nepal:

- Ensures the army is deployed only as a last resort in protest contexts, under legitimate civilian authority, safeguards against abuse;
- Protects and expands civic space, including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and access to information;
- Embeds [anti-torture protections in protest](#) response that upholds the absolute prohibition of torture in all circumstances, including where protests may turn violent;
- Implements the [UN Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons](#) by particularly ensuring that any use of force during demonstrations is exceptional, preceded by attempts at dialogue and de-escalation, strictly necessary and proportionate to the threat posed, directed only at violent individuals rather than entire crowds, and always accompanied by clear warnings and safe avenues for dispersal;
- Conducts prompt, independent, and impartial investigations into all protest-related killings, firearm use, and injuries; hold those responsible to account and treat any unlawful use of force as a violation of non-derogable prohibitions;
- Provides immediate and comprehensive support to survivors, including medical and psychological care; ensure child-sensitive services for children affected by protest violence in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child; provide reparations to victims and families.

About the Consortium: The United Against Torture Consortium pools the strengths and expertise of six leading anti-torture organisations (IRCT, OMCT, FIACAT, APT, Omega Research Foundation and REDRESS) in partnership with over 200 civil society organisations in more than 100 countries, to strengthen and expand the anti-torture movement. The European Union funds this project. The present statement was issued by IRCT, OMCT, Omega Research Foundation and Redress.