

To do justice to victims, rooting out the causes of law enforcement violence must become a priority, OSCE human rights head says

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WARSAW, 26 June 2020 – The root causes of excessive violence by law enforcement agencies, including torture or other ill-treatment, must be addressed comprehensively in order to acknowledge the injustice done to victims and help their path to recovery, said the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), on the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture today.

“To counter police brutality effectively, countries across the OSCE region need to ensure independent, prompt and effective investigations of each and every case,” said ODIHR Director Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir. “But that is not enough. States need to take a hard look at the root causes that lead to the use of violence by their law enforcement agencies, such as structural discrimination and racism, as well as institutional incentives for torture or ill-treatment.”

The global outcry caused by the death last month of George Floyd at the hands of police officers was only one example of disproportionate force used by law enforcement agents across the OSCE region. Excessive violence by law enforcement agencies, including torture or other ill-treatment, often disproportionately affects those already marginalized by the various inequalities present in all our societies. These are people who may be poor and underprivileged, belong to ethnic or religious minorities, or find themselves in a vulnerable position because they are migrants or asylum seekers.

“I’m extremely concerned by ongoing reports of excessive use of force by law enforcement personnel against migrants at some borders around the OSCE region,” the Director said. “While there is no question that countries have the right to protect their borders, they must ensure that all border management measures are in line with international law. This includes

the absolute prohibition of torture or other ill-treatment and the need to guarantee that no one is returned to a country where they risk being persecuted.

All countries across the OSCE region must take action now to put an end to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, by undertaking reforms that root out systemic discrimination, and putting effective safeguards in place to prevent such acts of violence in the future.”

Torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are prohibited worldwide, and ODIHR works closely with its partners to strengthen efforts in eradicating them entirely. Most recent publications include a guide on [monitoring places of detention during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). More information on ODIHR’s tools and other work in this area can be found [here](#).

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