

GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX 2025: THE PHILIPPINES FACTSHEET

OVERALL GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX SCORE:

HIGH RISK

The Global Torture Index 2025 is the first analysis designed to assess the risk of torture and ill-treatment across 26 countries worldwide. This 2025 factsheet for the Philippines includes an analysis of the country's overall performance, a breakdown by thematic pillars and key recommendations for driving meaningful change in the fight against torture and the promotion of human rights.

COLLABORATING ORGANISATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES:

Coalition Against
Trafficking in Women
- Asia Pacific (CATW-AP)

The Medical Action
Group (MAG)

Children's Legal Rights
and Development Center,
Inc.

The Philippines Alliance of
Human Rights Advocates
(PAHRA)

Task Force Detainees of
the Philippines (TFDP)

United Against Torture
Coalition (UATC) -
Philippines

AT A GLANCE

The situation in the Philippines continues to be characterised by widespread reports of torture, extrajudicial killings and attacks against human rights defenders and journalists. For 2025, the Global Torture Index classifies the country as facing a **high risk** of torture and ill-treatment, based on data collected in 2023 and 2024. While significant legal reforms, have been implemented to address human rights violations, such as the Anti-Torture Act of 2009, enforcement remains inconsistent and successful prosecutions are rare.

The “war on drugs” initiated by President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 dramatically escalated human rights violations, with widespread reports of torture. According to data cited by the ICC in 2021, it is estimated that between 12,000 and 30,000 civilians were killed in connection with anti-drug operations. Human rights violations have continued under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. As of March 2025, at least **928 individuals** have reportedly been killed in drug-related incidents, including at least 47 documented cases of children killed since Marcos Jr. took office.

Detainees frequently report physical and psychological abuse, particularly during interrogations. Poor prison conditions, such as severe overcrowding, inadequate medical care and unsanitary facilities, exacerbate an already dire situation and are in violation of international standards. Despite these realities, independent monitoring of detention facilities is infrequent. The lack of a robust National Preventive Mechanism, as required under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), worsening the situation considerably.

International scrutiny, including ongoing ICC investigations into potential crimes against humanity, has initially been met with [resistance by Philippine authorities](#). However, on 11 March 2025, former President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International airport following an [ICC-issued warrant](#) for crimes against humanity in connection with extrajudicial killings committed between November 2011 and March 2019 during his anti-drug campaign. Later that evening, he was flown to The Hague on a charter flight. On 14 March, he appeared before the ICC's Pre-Trial Chamber. The confirmation-of-charges hearing is currently provisionally scheduled for 23 September 2025.

GENERAL INFORMATION



Type of government:
Constitutional Republic



United Nations Convention Against Torture:
[Ratified](#)



OPCAT ratification:
[Ratified](#)



Population:
[116,211,486](#)



People deprived of liberty:
171,247 at 1.624 (53,397 in BuCor prisons, 117,850 in BJMP jails) (national prison administration)



Prison population (per 100,000 of national population):
149 based on an estimated national population of 115.29 million at the beginning of June 2024 (from United Nations figures)



Pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners (percentage of prison population):
65.2% (September 2022)
[Further Information](#)



Documented Detained Human Rights Defenders:
No Data



Alerts Issued by the Observatory for Human Rights Defenders in 2024:
0



Prison Occupancy level:
362.0% (31.5.2021 - 403% in prisons, c. 348% in jails)



Homicide rate (per 100,000 people):
[0.94](#)

THEMATIC PILLAR OVERVIEW



I. POLITICAL COMMITMENT

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

The Philippines has yet to demonstrate full alignment with international human rights standards concerning torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CIDTP). Even though it enacted the Anti-Torture Act of 2009, obstacles to its effective implementation persist.

The State has not accepted the competence of the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) to receive and examine individual complaints under Article 22 of the UN Convention Against Torture. Moreover, it has not ratified the 1992 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Engagement with the CAT and civil society organisations remains limited, with the State failing to implement the [recommendations issued by the Committee](#) in its Concluding Observations on the third periodic report of the Philippines in 2016.

The Philippines also lacks regulatory measures on the production, trade, procurement and use of weapons and equipment specifically designed to inflict torture or facilitate ill-treatment. The absence of controls on inherently degrading devices exacerbates the risk of abuse. Furthermore, the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), a key obligation under the Optional Protocol to the CAT, remains overdue.



II. ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Torture and other forms of ill-treatment remain pervasive during arrests in the Philippines, entrenched in law enforcement and military practices despite being prohibited under domestic and international law. Detainees are frequently denied access to legal counsel, timely medical care and the ability to challenge their detention. Interrogations often involve physical violence, intimidation and torture to extract confessions.

The Philippines consistently fails to comply with the [CAT's repeated calls](#) to respect the fundamental legal safeguards of persons deprived of liberty and to close all secret places of detention. Reported information suggests the existence of secret detention facilities where detainees are held incommunicado, stripped of any legal safeguards and subjected to a heightened risk of abuse.

Public assemblies are often met with excessive use of force by law enforcement, including the use of firearms, tasers and chemical irritants, resulting in severe injuries or fatalities. Safeguards such as the mandatory identification of officers and vehicles, as well as the use of body or surveillance cameras (mandated by the Supreme Court), are rarely enforced, while oversight and accountability mechanisms remain deeply inadequate. Extrajudicial killings are also common, and investigations into such killings, when conducted at all, are delayed, lack independence and rarely result in convictions.



III. FREEDOM FROM TORTURE WHILE DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Detention conditions in the Philippines are marked by severe overcrowding, systemic neglect and persistent abuses. Detention centres operate at over 362% capacity, significantly exceeding critical thresholds, with [inadequate living conditions](#), especially for people with disabilities. Prisoners endure inhumane treatment, including confinement in dark or constantly lit cells, corporal punishment, reduced food or water rations and restrictions on family contact. Health assessments upon entry are rare, and medical care is grossly inadequate. Visitors often provide essential necessities, yet visitation rights are tightly controlled and occasionally discriminatory.

Complaint mechanisms lack safeguards, exposing prisoners to reprisals, such as solitary confinement and denial of outside contact. Staff implicated in abuses are rarely suspended during investigations, and there is no public information on the outcomes of complaints. Minority groups face heightened risks, such as sexual violence, denial of cultural or religious practices and systemic discrimination. Children in detention are subjected to practices of torture, violence and corporal punishment, confinement in their overcrowded cells and sexual violence, despite the existence of legal safeguards that are rarely enforced. Many children also report being forced by police officers to physically harm other detained children.

Institutional deficiencies exacerbate these conditions. Penitentiary administration funding is insufficient to meet basic needs or provide adequate staff training, including on the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. More than half of the prison population consists of pre-trial detainees, with legally mandated time limits for pre-trial detention rarely being upheld and alternatives to detention infrequently employed. Immigration detention centres and psychiatric establishments suffer from similar shortcomings.



IV. ENDING IMPUNITY

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Victims of torture and CIDTP face significant barriers to seeking justice, including limited access to free legal aid and a lack of information about their right to redress. Vulnerable individuals, such as children and survivors of sexual violence, are not provided with special protections, and their privacy and safety are often disregarded. Despite the possibility of reparations through civil or administrative processes, these avenues are rarely pursued. Victims, witnesses and lawyers often face intimidation, threats and criminal charges to deter them from filing complaints. This is also true for children and their families, who face threats and reprisals for seeking justice.

Prosecutorial efforts to address torture are weak, with investigations into torture rarely being initiated without formal complaints, and cases often classified as less serious offences. Complaint mechanisms are largely ineffective, with victims often being required to lodge complaints at the same locations where the torture occurred. This not only discourages complaints but also exacerbates the risks of retaliation for the victims. Moreover, prosecutors fail to investigate acts involving complicity, superior responsibility or discriminatory motives. Lastly, the dedicated unit to handle torture cases has only investigated a few cases.

The judicial system's response remains inadequate, with courts seldom referring to international standards like the UN CAT or the Istanbul Protocol. Investigations into crimes by public officials lack independence and efficiency, and judges are often criticised for mishandling cases. There is no mandatory protocol for conducting medical examinations in cases of alleged torture, and forensic investigations are rarely undertaken. Even when medico-legal examinations are conducted, they are often not considered reliable.



V. VICTIM'S RIGHTS

INDEX SCORE: CONSIDERABLE RISK

Victims of torture and other ill-treatment in the Philippines face significant challenges in accessing reparations and rehabilitation due to inadequate legal frameworks and institutional support. Domestic legislation lacks provisions for systemic or collective redress. While Republic Act No. 7309 establishes a compensation mechanism through the Board of Claims, its adequacy is questionable as compensation is capped at 10,000 PHP (approximately 200 USD) and there is a cumbersome application process. The national fund for redress remains underfunded, and victims rarely receive meaningful compensation. Public apologies, acknowledgement of state responsibility or the restoration of employment, pensions or property are equally rare.

State mechanisms for victim assistance lack accessibility, funding and human resources, with minimal efforts to raise awareness about available services. Rehabilitation programmes are often poorly adapted to victims' specific needs. Access to rehabilitation services is legally free and available irrespective of judicial remedies, but this is rarely implemented in practice. Victims have little access to medical, psychological or legal support, and services addressing education, social assistance or professional reintegration are minimal. Civil society organisations often step in to fill these gaps, but they sometimes face restrictions or reprisals for their work. Moreover, no monitoring system exists to evaluate rehabilitation programmes, and victims lack accessible channels to provide feedback or lodge complaints.

Efforts to ensure non-recurrence of torture or ill-treatment are also insufficient. Over the last five years, the state has failed to implement measures aimed at preventing such abuses, and relevant personnel rarely receive training on the specific needs of victims or prompt aid provision. Programmes for victim safety, including temporary protection for urgent cases or support for relatives and witnesses, are virtually absent. Survivors and their families often face significant security risks, such as intimidation or stigmatisation, further deterring them from seeking justice.



VI. PROTECTION FOR ALL

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

The Philippines faces extensive challenges in addressing various forms of violence and discrimination. Practices such as intersex genital mutilation, honour crimes and forced sterilisation remain decriminalised. [Discriminatory laws](#), such as those prosecuting 'moral crimes,' disproportionately target women, while legislative gaps fail to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals. Furthermore, prohibitions on voluntary abortion and limited access to quality reproductive healthcare illustrate the lack of a comprehensive framework to support women's rights.

Specialised police units for gender-based violence exist but are limited, and state support for victims of domestic violence often lacks independence, confidentiality and accessibility. Shelters, psychosocial counselling and legal support are rarely available, particularly for vulnerable groups like children and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Similarly, victims of human trafficking frequently lack access to state-provided recovery and reintegration services and often face repatriation, while the underdeveloped asylum system fails to offer adequate safeguards for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers and children, leaving them vulnerable to further violence and exploitation.

Indigenous peoples routinely face forced evictions, military incursions and systemic violations of their collective rights without redress. In the context of counterterrorism, individuals often experience torture or CIDTP during interrogations, with vague legal definitions enabling violations such as prolonged detention, forced confessions and deportation to countries where they risk further harm. In armed conflict, civilians and combatants alike suffer from acts of torture, sexual violence, forced displacement and other human rights violations, with little accountability or judicial oversight. Women and children are particularly vulnerable, with documented cases of rape, sexual exploitation and forced recruitment into armed groups.

TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT AGAINST CHILDREN

In the Philippines, children are particularly affected by torture and other ill-treatment, as well as extrajudicial killings. During the regime of President Duterte, they were direct targets of extrajudicial killings in the context of the 'war on drugs,' with at least 122 child victims of killings from July 2016 to December 2019. To this day, children, and in particular children from marginalised communities, continue to be deliberately killed, with at least 50 child victims for years 2022 and 2023. Reprisals against families who try to file complaints for the death of their children are widespread, including through threats, intimidation, arrests and detention.

Detention of children is used as a first resort, in contravention of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, which prescribes diverse processes and alternatives to detention, but lacks implementation. Arbitrary detention is very frequent, including for alleged drug offences. Children detained in Bahay Pag-Asa are subjected to torture and ill-treatment: severe beatings, overcrowding in cells where, in some places, they must take turns to sleep, confinement in cells for several days, humiliation, among other abuses. In police stations, children in particular are subjected to torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment, with several reports of children being hanged by their hands and beaten, suffering head injuries and being detained with adults. Additionally, gaps in legal protections leave children vulnerable to harmful practices such as child marriage and corporal punishment. Access to justice and legal counsel is severely limited for children, who often lack the means or capacity to understand judicial processes and may face prolonged, even arbitrary, detention.



VII. RIGHT TO DEFEND AND CIVIC SPACE

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Human rights defenders in the Philippines face systemic challenges, including legal harassment, intimidation and attacks. Repressive laws such as the [Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020](#) and the [Cybercrime Prevention Act](#) are frequently employed to suppress dissent by enabling warrantless arrests, expanding surveillance and criminalising critical voices. Civil society organisations face significant barriers as well, as their legal status is contingent on state approval, with arbitrary deregistration and restrictions on foreign funding frequently used to curtail their activities. Although freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed, protests perceived as critical of the government are often suppressed.

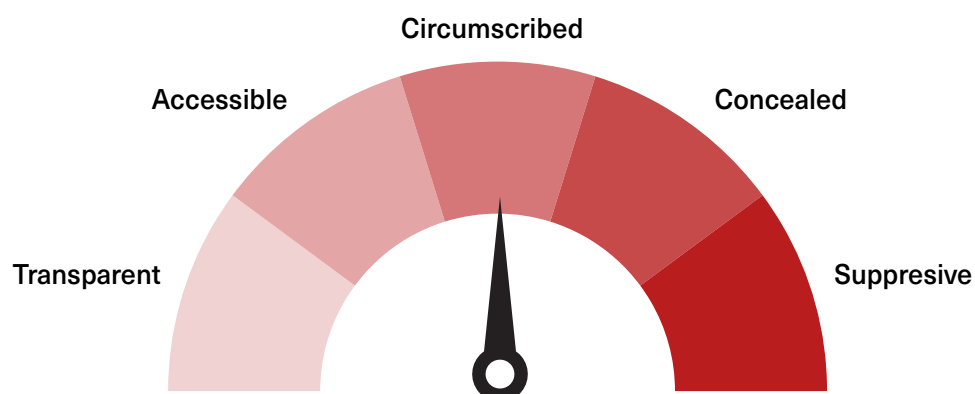
A culture of impunity exacerbates these issues, with HRDs facing constant threats and persecution. 'tagging', a practice where individuals or groups are accused of having ties to communist insurgencies, is widespread and often leads to unlawful surveillance, threats and even extrajudicial killings. Cases like the enforced disappearance and coerced affidavits of environmental activists Jhed Tamano and Jonila Castro, as well as the abductions of indigenous rights defenders such as Alia Encela in Oriental Mindoro, illustrate the precarious position of HRDs. Journalists are similarly vulnerable, with 117 journalists killed over the past three decades, and only a fraction of these cases achieving justice.

The risks for HRDs are compounded for those engaging with international mechanisms. Reprisals against individuals cooperating with bodies such as the United Nations often go unaddressed. Furthermore, the State has not extended an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders for an official visit. There is no legal framework in place to protect HRDs in the Philippines, although a Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill is currently under discussion and pending approval.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Global Torture Index rates the access to information and transparency available in each country when measuring and assessing the risks of torture and ill-treatment. It considers the availability of information, as well as the obstacles faced by civil society organisations in collecting data and their ability to access it. Data access must be guaranteed in every society, both in law and in practice, to ensure state transparency and accountability. It enables organisations, journalists and individuals to request information on public bodies, protocols and statistics on human rights violations. This indicator reflects the challenges in accessing information within a country, with each country and territory assigned a rating as Suppressive, Concealed, Circumscribed, Accessible or Transparent.

The Philippines' score is **circumscribed**, based on our evaluation of its current level of transparency and access to information.



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN THE PHILIPPINES: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Index includes 5 recommendations for the Philippines, taken from the [Index webpage](#), which will serve as references in upcoming editions to monitor achievements within the anti-torture movement.

1. Recognise the competence of the Committee Against Torture to review individual complaints under Article 22 of the Convention Against Torture, ratify the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and pass the NPM Bill without delay, establishing an independent oversight body to prevent torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities, in line with its obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).
2. Provide comprehensive training for law enforcement, military officers and personnel and other concerned authorities on human rights, with a strong emphasis on the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, including of children, and its gendered dimensions. Regularly assess officers' skills, particularly in arrest procedures, and establish confidential reporting mechanisms to encourage the reporting of human rights abuses in police stations, prisons, rehabilitation centres, such as Bahay Pag-Asa, mental or psychiatric institutions and other facilities, including safe houses under witness protection programmes.
3. Conduct independent and transparent investigations into extrajudicial killings linked to the 'war-on-drugs', ensuring that all perpetrators are held accountable in accordance with international human rights standards. Fully cooperate with international mechanisms investigating human rights violations and take all necessary steps to create a secure and supportive environment that enables victims, their families, and civil society organisations that support them to safely engage in the legal process, both at the international level and within Philippine courts. Strengthen domestic accountability by enhancing the capacity of the Commission on Human Rights with sufficient resources to investigate allegations of torture and other abuses, establishing specialised units within the legal system to investigate and prosecute cases of torture and reviewing and amending the Anti-Terrorism Act, in particular articles 25 and 29. Additionally, regularly publish sex-disaggregated data and reports on measures taken to prevent torture.
4. Repeal or amend restrictive laws, such as the Anti-Terrorism Act, that undermine freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and to foster an environment where civil society can operate without fear of reprisal. Ensure the swift passage of the Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Protection Bill, ensuring it includes strong legal safeguards against harassment, arbitrary detention and other forms of retaliation, and enact an Anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) legislation to protect freedom of expression and prevent legal harassment of human rights defenders and journalists.
5. Ensure the implementation of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, including ensuring that children are only detained as a last resort, and establish and implement diversion mechanisms, in line with international standards. Ensure the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment of children, including in police stations during arrests, in police custody and in any deprivation of liberty, and the prohibition of arbitrary arrests and detention. Ensure accountability, without reprisals, for cases of torture and extrajudicial killings of children.



FURTHER RESOURCES

For further information, the complete 2025 Torture Index—including detailed data visualisations, FAQs, the methodology, and more—can be accessed on our website: <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at tortureindex@omct.org.

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