

REDRESS

Ending torture, seeking justice for survivors

BULLETIN

No. 10



CIVIL SOCIETY UNITES TO MAKE JUSTICE WORK



DIRECTOR'S LETTER

The Threat of Impunity is Too Great to Tackle Alone

Impunity remains the most significant obstacle to justice and reparation for survivors of human rights violations. We have witnessed a global rise in impunity, which has eroded the rule of law, fuelled inequality and created cycles of violence.

In Sudan, this impunity has enabled perpetrators on both sides of the conflict to commit serious human rights abuses, possible war crimes, and crimes against humanity, as detailed in our report. In Egypt, torture has become so widespread and systematic that REDRESS and partner organisations have found it to amount to a crime against humanity.

Confronting impunity is no mean feat. Perpetrators do not relinquish power easily, and efforts to hold them accountable are often met with resistance. But working together with survivors and civil society we can take steps to hold perpetrators accountable, as exemplified by our work with local partners documenting human rights abuses in Belarus.

Earlier this year, REDRESS united with ten other civil society organisations to form the Global Initiative Against Impunity. The four-year initiative seeks to turn the tide against impunity by enhancing survivors and civil society's power to shape justice processes and strengthen accountability frameworks.

Survivors have played a fundamental part in these advancements, fighting relentlessly to bring perpetrators to justice, in some cases for decades. One example is the landmark case won by 36 Maya Achi women in Guatemala (featured on our cover) against former paramilitaries for sexual violence during the internal armed conflict.

As a survivor of torture, our founder Keith Carmichael, knew the importance of holding perpetrators accountable and the challenges of overcoming impunity. Keith founded REDRESS in 1992 to help other survivors surmount the obstacles that often stood in their way to justice.

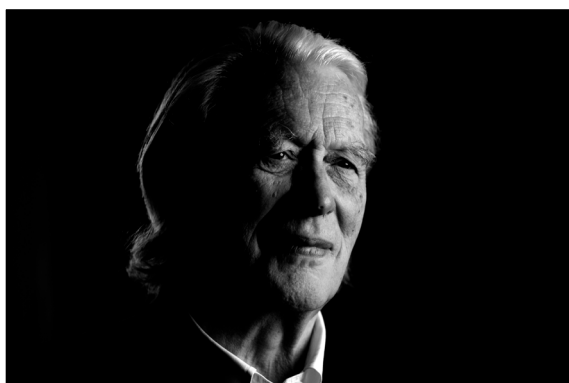
Over 30 years since founding REDRESS, the threat of impunity remains great, but together, we are determined to make justice a reality for survivors of torture.

“Confronting impunity is no mean feat. Perpetrators do not relinquish power easily, and efforts to hold them accountable are often met with resistance.”



Rupert Skilbeck,
Director of REDRESS

Follow Rupert on [@RupertSkilbeck](#)



© Fiona Lloyd-Davies. Keith Carmichael.

REDRESS pays tribute to the legacy of Keith Carmichael and Leah Levin

REDRESS was deeply saddened to announce the passings of our founder Keith Carmichael on 21 March and our longtime Trustee and Patron Leah Levin on 25 May. Both Keith and Leah devoted themselves to REDRESS, leaving a profound legacy. Keith founded REDRESS in 1992 after he was arbitrarily detained and tortured in Saudia Arabia in the early 1980s. Upon his release he championed reparation for survivors, which he saw as crucial to help survivors heal and reclaim their lives. Leah Levin was a leading figure in the international human rights movement. She served as Director of the legal reform organisation Justice and was a founding board member of REDRESS, which she said “captured” her heart.

Ending the Cycle of Violence and Torture Against Protesters

By **Renata Politi**, Legal Advisor

Follow Renata on Twitter [@PolitiRenata](https://twitter.com/PolitiRenata)

Amid a global surge in protests demanding change from those in power, we have witnessed excessive force used against peaceful protesters in numerous countries, including Georgia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, the US, France, Egypt, Sudan, and Venezuela.

REDRESS is responding to this problem with projects that aim to bring attention to the issue, determine responsibility, and push for legal and policy reforms.

One of these projects is the [United Against Torture Consortium](#), where we have joined forces with five of the world's leading anti-torture organisations to address the use of torture to oppress dissent. We have challenged the excessive use of force and weaponry by police and security forces in extra-judicial contexts, especially in pro-democracy protests and non-violent social demonstrations.

REDRESS has also raised attention to torture and other human rights violations suffered by protesters and dissenters in Sudan, Egypt, and Belarus.

In Sudan, the years that have followed the end of Omar al-Bashir's rule in 2019 have seen a continuation in the [violent crackdowns](#) on protesters, human rights activists and others, as well as another coup, followed by an armed conflict, where widespread human rights violations may amount to both war crimes and crimes against humanity. REDRESS has advocated for reforms to prevent, prosecute, and provide redress for serious human rights violations as well as drawing attention to the institutional and structural factors which have historically facilitated the violence.



© Mahmoud Hjjaj/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images. Security forces intervene with protesters demanding the restoration of civilian rule in Khartoum in January 2024.

In Egypt, REDRESS and partners have [urged](#) the government to reform its state of emergency laws and anti-terrorism measures, whose far-reaching powers have been used to silence actual or perceived critics of the government. REDRESS has also highlighted how Egyptian authorities have weaponised torture as a political tool to persecute minorities and suppress dissent for decades. Our report to the UN Committee against Torture concluded that the use of torture is so widespread and systematic as to amount to a crime against humanity. Subsequently, in its review of Egypt's record on torture, the UN body found "numerous and consistent allegations of systematic use of torture and ill-treatment" by Egyptian authorities.

In Belarus, as part of the [International Accountability Platform for Belarus](#), REDRESS has supported the collection of information and evidence from over 2,300 survivors and witnesses related to gross human rights violations allegedly committed by Belarusian authorities to silence dissent during the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath.



[Watch a video about the Consortium](#)

Confronting the Torture Crisis in Palestine/Israel

In recent months, the [United Against Torture Consortium](#) has drawn attention to consistent accounts of [widespread torture and abuse](#) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel. The Consortium has called on all parties to take immediate action to uphold the absolute ban on torture and other ill-treatment.

Partners in the Consortium have received credible [accounts](#) of widespread torture and abuse of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, including severe beatings, sexual assault, humiliation, and denial of medical care at the hands

of Israeli officials. There are also mounting accounts and testimonies of torture and other ill-treatment of people in Israel by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups during the 7 October attacks and in the subsequent hostage-taking.

REDRESS welcomed the UK government's recent decision to reinstate funding to the UN Agency for Palestine Refugees, after working with Freedom from Torture to [highlight](#) that the original decision to suspend the funding may have been based on evidence obtained through torture.

Realising the Right of Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence to Reparation



© Juan Delavele/Reuters. People react after a verdict was given in the emblematic case of conflict-related sexual violence Sepur Zarco in Guatemala.

By **Julie Bardèche**, Senior Legal Advisor

Follow Julie on [@JulieBardeche](#)

In 2015, Hakeema Mahmood Chalo Taha, a Yazidi survivor activist from Kojo, Iraq, was abducted by members of the extremist Islamic group ISIS and taken to Raqqa, Syria, where she was kept in captivity and suffered sexual violence.

Her story resonates with the experiences of thousands of Yazidi women who were abducted and subjected to sexual violence at the hands of ISIS. Some are still in captivity and their fate and whereabouts are unknown.

As highlighted in our recent report with the Global Survivors Fund, Realising Reparation for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, survivors of sexual violence in this and other conflicts continue to grapple with long-lasting impacts of the violence they suffered. Survivors face stigmatisation and social exclusion even long after conflicts have ended. This discourages them from

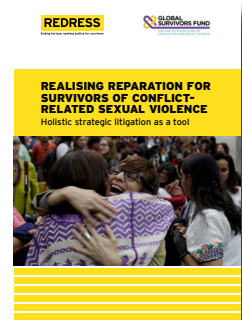
coming forward and hinders their access to justice. Our report highlights examples from several countries where REDRESS has worked, including Chad, the DRC, Kenya, Nepal, Peru, Sudan, Uganda, and Ukraine.

Reparation is crucial to redress the harms caused, help survivors rebuild their lives, and restore their dignity and independence. Yet our research indicates that most survivors around the world are not able to access reparation, and when reparation is available, it is insufficient or delayed. This leaves survivors in a situation of extreme vulnerability, where their needs and harms are not addressed and often their suffering worsens.

Our recent submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture for her report on sexual torture, presented to the UN Human Rights Council in June, illustrated the many challenges faced by survivors and identified priority areas for improvement.

We also put forward recommendations to challenge the prevailing impunity for conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan and provided an analysis of the current reparation initiatives for survivors in Ukraine, outlining a roadmap to deliver comprehensive and holistic reparations to victims.

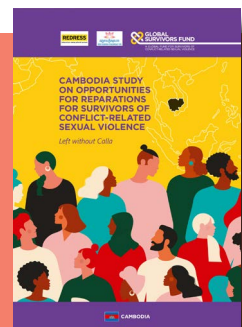
REDRESS and the Global Survivors Fund have called on the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN body of experts that monitors implementation of the main global treaty on women's rights, to develop a specific General Recommendation on reparation for conflict-related sexual violence to help inform its practice and provide further guidance to States on this issue.



A roadmap for addressing conflict-related sexual violence

Other reports from REDRESS, which examine the scope and prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence in several countries and the main obstacles that survivors face in realising their right to reparations, include: Left Without Calla, which identified opportunities for reparations for survivors of sexual violence during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia; Beyond Survival, which highlighted the need to restore peace and democracy in Myanmar and to provide interim

reparation initiatives to meet survivors' pressing needs; and Breaking the Silence, which draw attention to the desperate need for reparations of victims of the late Chadian President Hissène Habré. The reports were written as part of a multi-country study led by the Global Survivors Fund (GSF).



Centring Survivors in Strategic Litigation and Reparation Processes

By **Camila Restrepo**, Community Officer

Torture doesn't just impact the individual victim. It shatters families and communities, fostering a culture of silence and fear. Despite the stigmatisation that survivors often face, at REDRESS, we have the privilege of witnessing their resilience and tenacity through our day-to-day work.

A survivor-centred approach asks us to not just view survivors as victims and rights-holders, but as individuals with agency, skills, expertise, and resilience. Centring survivors' voices is crucial to everything we do and is one of our three core values.

REDRESS has carried out several initiatives to adopt a survivor-centred approach in our work. We published the groundbreaking Whose Justice? Reflections from UK-based Survivors of Torture, which canvassed the views of what justice and reparation meant to survivors and their family members.

Our Survivor Advisory Group, a network of UK-based survivors of torture, launched in 2022, continues to guide our survivor-centred approach and policy advocacy in the UK. The group's main priorities are protecting the absolute prohibition of torture and putting survivors' voices at the centre of legislative and policy proposals.


We have also developed a series of resources to help other practitioners adopt a survivor-centred approach in their work, including a new practice note, A Survivor-Centred Approach to Seeking Reparation for Torture. This practice note offers guidance on how to ensure survivors' participation, reduce their risk of further harm and re-traumatisation, and to reinforce their agency and self-determination in human rights litigation and reparation processes.



© Joss Gillespie. Members of the Survivor Advisory Group and REDRESS' staff pose after a meeting in London.

“Ultimately, involving survivors in the anti-torture sector’s processes can lead to more effective policies, better outcomes for survivors, and a greater respect for human rights.”

Tawanda, a member of the Survivor Advisory Group

 **Watch our webinar on best practices for survivor-centred reparations**



“There is a community of survivors who should be part of a victims-based approach that can help the UK lead a global fight against torture”.

Matthew Hedges, member of REDRESS' Survivor Advisory Group

Take Torture Seriously Campaign

The Survivor Advisory Group released the Take Torture Seriously campaign in the run up to the UK 2024 General Election. The campaign featured video testimonies from members of the group and urged political candidates and voters to consider survivors' needs and voices. Videos and graphics were shared across our social media platforms, generating a high level of engagement, showing that it is a matter of concern to many citizens.

Making Sanctions More Effective to Secure Financial Accountability

By Natalia Kubesch, Legal Officer

Targeted sanctions remain a preferred tool of governments around the world to respond to urgent human rights crises. In the last months, the UK Government, for example, has used sanctions to challenge Myanmar military-linked enterprises and infantry divisions responsible for ongoing repression and attacks against civilians, and Russian individuals heading up the Arctic penal colony where Alexei Navalny was killed.

to amplifying sanctions' impact, as is engaging with civil society and victims. REDRESS has outlined a series of recommendations in our reports Multilateral Magnitsky Sanctions at Five Years, and Evaluating Targeted Sanctions.

Another priority of our work has been pursuing lawful routes to facilitate the confiscation of sanctioned assets linked to human rights abuses and repurpose them to fund reparations for victims. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the UK has frozen over £22.7 billion in Russian assets. While a substantial portion of these funds could transform the lives of millions of survivors of human rights violations in Ukraine, current UK law is not equipped to confiscate these assets.

REDRESS has published recommendations for legal and policy reforms that the UK Government should implement to ensure the repurposing of profits derived from violations of human rights and humanitarian law as reparations for victims. Our recommendations show that innovative avenues are available to produce significant funds that would have a transformative impact on the lives of victims.

REDRESS has also urged the UK Government to help unblock the impasse over the proceeds of the £2.5 billion sale of the Chelsea FC, so they be used to support victims of the conflict.

© Commission Air/Alamy Stock Photo. Civil society groups have urged the UK government to do more to resolve the impasse over the proceeds of the sale of the Chelsea FC.

Yet, to date, some of the most notorious human rights abusers and corrupt actors, including in Iran, Nigeria, Sudan, China, or Egypt, have not been sanctioned by the UK.

The legitimacy of targeted sanctions as a tool for international accountability hinges on their consistent and fair use. It also requires robust enforcement to ensure those targeted cannot exploit loopholes by seeking refuge in other jurisdictions.

REDRESS has set out recommendations to make sanctions more effective. These include ensuring that governments deploy their targeted sanctions regimes fairly and consistently against perpetrators of human rights violations and corruption, without fear or favour.

We have also stressed that improving international coordination in the implementation of sanctions is vital



Fulfilling the Promise to Ukrainian Victims

By Victoria Kerr, Legal Consultant

Follow Victoria on [@VictoriaMKerr](#)

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and a decade of conflict, REDRESS has been working with partners in Ukraine and around the world to explore innovative routes to finance and deliver reparation for victims affected by the conflict.

Urgent action is needed to address the harms victims have suffered and help them to rebuild their lives. With widespread human rights violations, over 135,000 reported war crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence and torture, and an estimated 14 million Ukrainians needing psychological aid, survivors cannot wait for Russia's cooperation or willingness to provide reparation. Ukraine and the international community have a responsibility to step in.

REDRESS has urged the UK government to repurpose frozen Russian assets to address victims' urgent needs and to realise their right to reparation. Since the announcement in March 2022 that £2.5 billion from the sale of Chelsea Football Club by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich might be earmarked for a charitable foundation to aid victims of the conflict in Ukraine, REDRESS has pressed the UK Government to take steps to release these funds and direct them towards reparation for victims of the conflict.

Earlier this year, REDRESS and 60 Ukrainian and international organisations and individuals sent an [open letter](#) to former PM Rishi Sunak calling on his government to act swiftly to break the deadlock over the funds and fulfil the commitment made two years ago.



© REUTERS/Ahmed Jadallah. A residential neighbourhood in Irpin, Ukraine, damaged by Russian shelling, following the Russian invasion.

“Survivors cannot wait for Russia’s cooperation or willingness to provide reparation. Ukraine and the international community have a responsibility to step in.”



[Listen to Rupert Skilbeck on the Today programme](#)

Cross-Party Support for a Legal Right to Consular Assistance in The UK

Providing consular assistance to British nationals abroad, particularly those at risk of human rights violations, can provide a vital safeguard against torture. However, in the UK the decision to offer consular assistance is solely at the discretion of the UK government.

For this reason, REDRESS welcomes the cross-party commitment shown by the main political parties ahead of the UK General Election on 4 July, either to enshrine a right to consular assistance in UK law or at least to strengthen the support offered in complex detention cases.

The Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives, Labour, and the Scottish National Party included [commitments related](#)

[to consular assistance](#) in their proposed programmes for government.

REDRESS has long argued that moving consular assistance onto a legislative footing would give greater certainty for British nationals at risk of human rights abuses abroad. To inform our advocacy, we have published several briefings. One of them sets out a series of [principles](#) to help shape a legal right to consular assistance. Another analyses different approaches towards the provision of consular assistance in other [domestic legal frameworks](#), providing examples of how different countries protect their citizens.

30 Years of REDRESS



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For 30 years REDRESS has worked to deliver justice and reparation for survivors of torture, many targeted because of discrimination or to suppress dissent, while also seeking to promote solidarity in the anti-torture movement.

Supporting REDRESS means helping us to pursue legal claims with survivors, prosecute perpetrators, and change policies to protect people at risk. Our supporters stand with marginalised individuals and movements challenging

injustice by helping us to challenge torture that is used to suppress these groups. They also strengthen the anti-torture movement by enabling us to work in collaboration with local partners around the world, many of whom operate in extremely difficult circumstances.

If you would like to hear more about our work and how you can support, please contact Anoushka Canagaretna, Programme Development Manager, on anoushka@redress.org.

Become a regular supporter

It is the vital contributions of REDRESS' supporters which allow us to continue challenging torture where and whenever it occurs. In order to maintain ongoing casework to represent those wrongfully imprisoned or targeted for their identity or activism, we rely on donations that can support this long-term work.

Litigation of this nature often takes several years to reach a judgement, so sustained support allows us to see

these cases through, supporting survivors with the assistance they need to pursue justice.

We are constantly striving to promote the voices of communities affected by torture and the organisations assisting them, increase awareness and advocate for judgements that will prevent further abuses from taking place. Supporter donations facilitate this work to realise our vision of a world without torture.

Support our ongoing cases: redress.org/donate