

OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (June 2026)

Keynote Address Andrea Huber, Head of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB)

Distinguished Chair,
Excellencies,

It is an honor to address you today.

As the speaker before me has highlighted, torture and ill-treatment remain a reality for far too many people.

The challenge before us is not whether to prohibit torture. The international community has already made that choice. The prohibition of torture is one of the clearest and most universally accepted norms of international law, and of OSCE commitments. The challenge is how to act collectively to prevent torture and to ensure accountability when that prohibition is violated, including in the context of atrocity crimes.

These commitments are not abstract aspirations, certainly not for victims and survivors. They are designed to protect human dignity.

They resonate with the broader principles of the UN Charter, which are worth reminding ourselves of. In its preamble the charter proclaimed the determination “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person (...), and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.”

Today, I would like to reflect on the indispensable role of these principles in practice, and on how, through multilateral action, they can advance accountability for torture and ill-treatment. I will do so through the example of Belarus and the work of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB), which was established as a direct and practical follow-up to an OSCE Moscow Mechanism.

The example of the IAPB demonstrates the power of collective action. It shows how it can enable the preservation of truth and create pathways to justice with a long-term vision as a human rights crisis unfolds.

In light of a crackdown on dissent in Belarus following the presidential election and reports of a profound wave of repression, in August 2020, 17 participating States invoked the Moscow Mechanism.

The Rapporteur found human rights abuses “to be massive and systematic and proven beyond doubt”, including well-documented cases of torture and general impunity.

The report’s recommendations called for the documentation of violations with a view to bringing perpetrators among the Belarusian security forces and their responsible superiors to justice.

In March 2021, those recommendations helped inspire the establishment of the IAPB.

This was significant for several reasons.

First, it demonstrated that multilateral action does not have to end with the publication of a report; it can create the foundations for meaningful follow-up and accountability. The creation of the IAPB has turned some of the report's recommendations into tangible results.

Second, it represented an innovative accountability model. Established with the support of a coalition of States, the IAPB was created as a survivor-centred civil society documentation mechanism operating at a nationwide scale collecting, preserving, and analysing evidence of serious international crimes committed in Belarus. It is a consortium composed of DIGNITY as the lead organization, Human Rights Center Viasna, International Committee to Investigate Torture and Redress as co-leads.

Its set-up offers considerable added value. By collecting evidence across the country in a coordinated and systematic manner, and based on common standards, methodologies, and consent procedures, it creates a professional and reliable evidentiary resource for criminal justice authorities. Evidence is preserved systematically in secure repositories, reducing fragmentation, and strengthening the prospects for future accountability.

Third, the example of the IAPB exemplifies that multilateral coalitions will step in when national institutions are unwilling to seize violations of international law.

Finally, all of these aspects demonstrate the continued relevance of OSCE mechanisms in the absence of national remedies.

Sadly, the violations documented in Belarus by the 2020 Mechanism are not confined to the past. They have persisted in the years since, making the IAPB’s ongoing documentation indispensable to securing justice for victims.

The UN Committee against Torture, the 2023 Moscow Mechanism, the UN Group of Independent Experts on Belarus, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus have all established the credibility of allegations of torture and ill-treatment up until today.

In its art 20 inquiry in 2022, the Committee Against Torture stated that the information it collected leads to “the inescapable conclusion that torture is a systematic practice in Belarus”, further stating that (...) “it is apparent (...) that the torture cases reported have not occurred fortuitously in a particular place or at a particular time but are seen to be habitual, widespread and deliberate in at least a considerable part of the territory”.

The prevalence of impunity makes the case for accountability all the more pressing.

When State agents and political leaders are held responsible for serious abuses, it is a signal that such conduct will have consequences. It affirms the dignity of victims. It is the prerequisite to rehabilitation and redress. It helps rebuild trust in institutions. And importantly, it can serve as a deterrent against future violations.

Impunity, by contrast, is not merely the absence of justice, but the enabling condition for future abuse.

The experience of Belarus, again, demonstrates this well.

The UN Group of Independent Experts on Belarus, in its 2025 report, links impunity for torture to decades of authoritarian rule, the erosion of democratic institutions, and the failure to hold perpetrators accountable. It finds that repeated allegations of torture were met with a lack of meaningful investigations or reforms, entrenching a system in which security forces could act without fear of consequences.

Returning to the issue of multilateralism, international law recognises that the prevention of torture is a shared responsibility. In its judgment in *Belgium v. Senegal*, the International Court of Justice confirmed that the Convention Against Torture includes obligations erga omnes partes, noting: that “[t]he States parties to the Convention have a common interest to ensure, in view of their shared values, that acts of torture are prevented and that, if they occur, their authors do not enjoy impunity. [...] That common interest implies that the obligations in question are owed by any State party to all the other States parties to the Convention.”

This principle resonates deeply with the human dimension. As the Moscow Document 1991, states, the participating States “categorically and irrevocably declare” that the human dimension commitments “are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.”

Again, the IAPB is a practical expression of that principle.

Since its establishment, the Platform has gathered testimony of over 2,000 survivors and

secured access to tens of thousands of supporting files. It has also developed a substantial open-source repository containing more than 2 million files.

Yet, documentation is not simply about collecting evidence, and international justice is a marathon, not a sprint. It is built document by document, year by year, case by case.

In my almost 30 years of work in the human rights sector, I have come across the challenge of accountability for atrocity crimes countless times. Almost by definition, in such situations, justice arrives many years—often even decades—after the violations occurred.

The pursuit of justice for crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979 demonstrates this vividly, for example. While investigators and prosecutors faced enormous challenges, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) still managed to secure some historic convictions of senior Khmer Rouge leaders accountable for mass atrocities. But much of the evidence had been destroyed, crime scenes had deteriorated, official records were incomplete, and countless witnesses had died or their memories had faded.

The lesson is clear: every day that evidence goes unrecorded, justice becomes harder to achieve.

That is why multilateral support for high-quality documentation in real time is such a game-changer for international justice. Today, technological advances have fundamentally transformed our ability to preserve evidence. Millions of people carry in their pockets a tool capable of documenting violations as they occur.

In addition, open-source research allows investigators to collect and corroborate evidence, including satellite imagery, videos, photographs, geolocation data, social media posts. Through rigorous verification and analysis, these materials can help establish the occurrence of crimes, patterns of abuse, and identify alleged perpetrators.

Modern technologies enable a scale and immediacy of evidence collection that would have been unimaginable when I began working in human rights in the 90ies.

The justice processes of the coming decades will be revolutionised by the technological capabilities and the documentation efforts of today.

We can invest in future accountability and in tomorrow's justice.

Documentation alone, however, is not enough to accomplish this. Evidence must be transformed into investigations and prosecutions in order to turn into accountability.

States remain the gatekeepers here. It is them who need to enshrine in their law and exercise in practice universal jurisdiction, who need to initiate investigations and prosecutions, who

can refer cases to international courts, and who can mandate and support international accountability mechanisms, thereby ultimately providing pathways to justice for victims.

Allow me to conclude with some recommendations:

First, States should continue to support independent documentation initiatives that collect evidence of international law violations.

Second, States should set proactive steps to enable national and international mechanisms to advance investigations. For Belarus, the IAPB has laid out a menu of accountability options in its report “*Paths to Accountability for Belarus*”.

Third, participating States should continue to make use of OSCE instruments. In the case of Belarus, in light of the continuing severe human rights violations, it would be opportune to appoint a Rapporteur to address temporal, and subject-matter gaps in existing documentation and assessment.

Mme Chair,

Too often, multilateralism is discussed in abstract terms. We speak about institutions, declarations and diplomatic processes. But multilateralism matters because it can produce practical results on the scales of justice.

We can see the prospect for accountability based on modern-times documentation in the case of Syria, where years of meticulous evidence preservation by civil society is now supporting accountability efforts in multiple jurisdictions that would once have seemed out of reach.

I want to end noting my admiration and deep respect for the countless human rights defenders who take it upon themselves to denounce human rights violations, bravely, unflinchingly, and at a great risk to themselves, driven by the conviction that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the OSCE human dimension commitments must – and can - be turned into reality.

Thank you.