

**Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly
and of association and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or
degrading treatment or punishment**

on

The unlawful use of metallic pellet guns on a civilian assembly in Delhi, India

Introduction

1. The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) is an independent, non-governmental organisation which promotes and protects human rights. We achieve this by supporting human rights defenders and civil society in their work by strengthening their capacity and expertise, reinforcing their protection and recognition under national and international law, and seeking to protect them from reprisals, restrictive environments and threats.
2. This submission addresses the unlawful firing of pellets on participants of the ‘Sansad Chalo’ protest organised by the Cockroach Janta Party in Delhi, India on 20 July 2026, which gravely injured a number of protestors. It first provides factual background to the protest and to the authorities’ use of force, then sets out the applicable international law framework (and provides an analysis of how the use of pellets in this context was unlawful), and concludes with recommendations for consideration by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and to Indian authorities.
3. The submission is based on information gathered primarily from Indian and international media reports, social media posts, a public interest litigation (PIL) lawsuit filed before the Supreme Court of India on 27 July 2026 (requesting a ban on the use of pellet guns loaded with metallic pellets in the context of crowd dispersal in civilian assemblies), international law treaties and guidance, reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), reports of UN mandate holders, and reports of international NGOs.

Factual background

4. An Indian youth movement, named the ‘Cockroach Janta Party’ (CJP) after derogatory comments made by the Chief Justice of India comparing unemployed

youth with fake degrees to cockroaches, was founded in May 2026.¹ The CJP launched a protest in June at Delhi's Jantar Mantar against alleged examination corruption in India.² The movement highlighted the cancellation of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for medical colleges due to a question paper leak, which caused several students to die by suicide³ and forced millions of students to re-take the test⁴. The movement called for broader education reform and accountability in the form of resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan.⁵ At the protest venue, three students sat on hunger strike for 23 days along with an internationally acclaimed scientist and educationist, Sonam Wangchuk.⁶ The Government made no effort to engage with the protest for several weeks.⁷

5. The CJP then called for a 'Sansad Chalo' march towards the Parliament building on 20 July 2026, the first day of the monsoon session of Parliament. Thousands of people gathered at Jantar Mantar to participate, despite denial of police permission for the march.⁸ Grave violence erupted as law enforcement authorities deployed a brutal and aggressive 'lathi charge' (baton attack) and used tear gas to disperse unarmed protestors, some of whom were reportedly breaching barricades.⁹ Reports also emerged of the police using electric shocks and batons embedded with nails.¹⁰ According to the Delhi Police's own estimate, at least 60 protestors were injured.¹¹ No

¹ "Cockroach Janta Party": Top Indian judge's comment sparks satire, protest', Al Jazeera, 20 May 2026 (available [here](#)); 'Who are India's Cockroach Janta party and why are they staging protests?', The Guardian, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)); 'How India's employment exams turned its 'cockroach' youth against Modi', Reuters, 3 August 2026 (available [here](#)).

² 'We're an Electoral Autocracy': Meet the Cockroaches at the First Cockroach Janta Party Protest', The Wire, 7 June 2026 (available [here](#)); 'Who are India's Cockroach Janta party and why are they staging protests?', The Guardian, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

³ 'We're an Electoral Autocracy': Meet the Cockroaches at the First Cockroach Janta Party Protest', The Wire, 7 June 2026 (available [here](#)); 'What was my fault?': How India's exam paper leak ended young lives', BBC, 3 August 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁴ 'Police attack Cockroach activists as thousands march on Indian parliament', Al Jazeera, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁵ 'Who are India's Cockroach Janta party and why are they staging protests?', The Guardian, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁶ 'Three student activists end hunger strike after 23 days at Jantar Mantar following opposition appeal', The New Indian Express, 21 July 2026 (available [here](#)); 'Health fears as frail Indian activist on hunger strike loses 8.2kg', BBC, 13 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁷ 'Tens of thousands of Cockroach movement protesters defy police with Delhi march', The Guardian, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁸ 'Police block thousands of 'cockroach' protesters marching on India's parliament', BBC, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)); 'Police attack Cockroach activists as thousands march on Indian parliament', Al Jazeera, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁹ 'Police block thousands of 'cockroach' protesters marching on India's parliament', BBC, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)); 'Police attack Cockroach activists as thousands march on Indian parliament', Al Jazeera, 20 July 2026 (available [here](#)); 'India: Excessive Force Used Against Student Protesters', Human Rights Watch, 23 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

¹⁰ 'Pellets', 'shocks', 'batons with nails': Injuries of those at Cockroach march to Parliament tell tales', The Telegraph Online, 24 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

¹¹ 'Broken bones, blood, pellet wounds: Injured protesters recount police crackdown during July 20 march', The New Indian Express, 22 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

warnings were issued¹² before this brutal and excessive use of force by the police.

6. Additionally, there is strong evidence of the indiscriminate shooting of ‘pellets’ at protestors, which forms the basis for this submission. According to the PIL filed before the Supreme Court of India¹³, ‘pellet guns’ (or projectile actions guns) are usually pump action guns of .12 bore, which are loaded with a cartridge containing between 250-400 small projectiles, referred to as ‘pellets’. These pellets are usually made with lead or other metal, and there are also rubber pellet alternatives. It is also not uncommon for there to be a mix of rubber and metallic pellets. Pellets target a wide zone in the general direction in which they are fired, which inevitably creates the risk of severe injuries to the eyes and other vital organs of victims.
7. The Rapid Action Force (**RAF**), the anti-riot unit of Central Reserve Police Force (**CRPF**), was deployed by Delhi Police for crowd management during the protest. Delhi Police denied the use of pellets.¹⁴ However, as per news reports, RAF personnel launched at least seven rounds from a pellet gun, five of which hit protestors.¹⁵ It was claimed that the rounds were fired in response to protestors attacking law enforcement officials.¹⁶ It was also reported on the basis of police station logs that an ‘Anti-Riot Gun’ (used to shoot rubber or plastic pellets, tear gas shells etc.) was fired twice on the orders of a senior police official.¹⁷ At least four persons (including peaceful protestors¹⁸) suffered severe injuries consistent with the use of pellet guns loaded with metallic pellets, and one of them may lose vision in his eye.¹⁹
8. Crucially, Human Rights Watch reported that the protests were largely peaceful, with a witness stating that they “have photos of protestors just standing there and the police beating them” and another witness confirming that the protestors were “just taking the

¹² Yashovardhan Azad and Ors. v. Union of India and Ors., Writ Petition No. 917 of 2026, para. 4(F). *See also* ‘Two Pellet Firing Victims Move Supreme Court Seeking Ban on Metallic Pellet Guns Against Civilians’, The Wire, 27 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

¹³ Yashovardhan Azad and Ors. v. Union of India and Ors., Writ Petition No. 917 of 2026, para. 4(E)(a)-(c).

¹⁴ X handle @DelhiPolice, 22 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

¹⁵ ‘RAF man fired 7 rounds from pellet gun, 5 hit protestors during CJP’s Parliament march: Probe’, The Indian Express, 27 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘RAF Fired Seven Pellet Gun Rounds on July 20, Five Hit Protesters, CRPF Report Finds’, The Wire, 27 July 2026 (available [here](#)). *See also* ‘Security Forces Aren’t Confirming Pellet Gun Use in Delhi, But Here’s What We’ve Been Able to Verify’, The Wire, 22 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

¹⁶ ‘RAF man fired 7 rounds from pellet gun, 5 hit protestors during CJP’s Parliament march: Probe’, The Indian Express, 27 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

¹⁷ ‘RAF man fired ‘anti-riot gun’ twice at protestors on orders of senior Delhi cop during CJP’s Sansad Chalo march’, The Indian Express, 29 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘Second Diary Entry Shows Delhi DCP Authorising Use of Pellet Guns in Writing’, The Wire, 29 July 2026 (available [here](#)). *See also* ‘Security Forces Aren’t Confirming Pellet Gun Use in Delhi, But Here’s What We’ve Been Able to Verify’, The Wire, 22 July 2026, (available [here](#)).

¹⁸ Yashovardhan Azad and Ors. v. Union of India and Ors., Writ Petition No. 917 of 2026.

¹⁹ ‘India’s ‘cockroach’ protestors have wounds consistent with pellet-gun fire, say experts’, BBC, 1 August 2026, (available [here](#)); ‘RAF personnel fired seven pellet rounds during July 20 student protest: Report’, The New Indian Express, 27 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘Exclusive | Outlook Reporter Suffers Pellet Wounds During Police Crackdown On CJP Protest’, Outlook, 22 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

hits”.²⁰ The PIL filed before the Supreme Court of India states that: “While the protesters were fleeing, with many raising their arms up as if in ‘surrender’ mode, despite no provocation, RAF personnel suddenly fired pump action gun(s), releasing a wide spray of splinter-like pellets, which penetrated the bodies of [petitioners], causing immediate pain and bleeding.”²¹

9. The OHCHR has previously documented the serious human rights implications of the use of pellet-firing shotguns (12-gauge pump-action shotgun firing metal pellets) in its 2018 and 2019 reports on the situation of human rights in Kashmir. The reports classify these guns as “one of the most dangerous weapons used in Kashmir” and recommend that Indian authorities “immediately order the end of the use of pellet-firing shotguns in Jammu and Kashmir for the purpose of crowd control”.²²
10. UN bodies have also expressly stated that the use of metallic pellet guns is unlawful in the context of civilian assemblies. OHCHR’s 2025 report on Bangladesh states: “The use of shotguns loaded [with] metal pellets in public order management is not in line with international human rights law. [...] The wide radius of the spreading metal shot makes this combination of firearm and ammunition inherently indiscriminate when deployed in the presence of large numbers of people. They can also not be considered ‘less-lethal’ given that the pellets penetrate the human body, meaning they will often prove to be deadly. They may also cause blinding and other serious injuries with long-term consequences.”²³ (In line with the OHCHR’s remarks, this submission adopts the position that pellet guns firing metallic pellets are not ‘less lethal’ weapons.) Further, the UN Fact Finding Mission on Iran has stated that: “The use of ammunition containing multiple metal pellets in protests amounts to indiscriminate use, due to the risk of serious injury to protesters and bystanders, and is unlawful.”²⁴
11. The brutal and clearly disproportionate use of force by the State has put the right to freedom of peaceful assembly at serious risk in India. CIVICUS has rated India’s civic space as ‘repressed’ and added the country to its CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist.²⁵ While the present submission focuses on the unlawful use of metallic pellet guns, this

²⁰ ‘India: Excessive Force Used Against Student Protesters’, Human Rights Watch, 23 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

²¹ ‘SC plea seeks ban on pellet guns after July 20 protest injuries’, The New Indian Express, 28 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

²² OHCHR, ‘Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan’, 14 June 2018, (available [here](#)), paras. 79-85 and para. 169(h) (recommendation to Indian authorities); OHCHR, ‘Update of the Situation of Human Rights in Indian-Administered Kashmir and Pakistan-Administered Kashmir from May 2018 to April 2019’, 8 July 2019, (available [here](#)), paras. 76-79 and para. 183(h) (recommendation to Indian authorities).

²³ OHCHR, Fact Finding Report: Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, 12 February 2025 (available [here](#)), page 22.

²⁴ Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2 February 2024, A/HRC/55/67 (available [here](#)), para. 26.

²⁵ ‘India added to human rights watchlist as repression intensifies in Modi’s third term’, CIVICUS, 29 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

measure must be viewed in the context of several other concerning tactics reportedly adopted by the Indian authorities to suppress the protest, several of which involve excessive use of force. These include forced removal from the protest site and arbitrary detention of Sonam Wangchuk (a well-known activist who was undertaking a hunger strike in support of students)²⁶, use of electric shocks and batons embedded with nails,²⁷ other attacks on peaceful and unarmed protestors (including on female protestors²⁸), deployment of plainclothes law enforcement personnel and officers without name badges,²⁹ detention of protestors,³⁰ branding of protestors as ‘terrorists’,³¹ use of facial recognition systems,³² and suspension of public transport³³ to block civilian access to the protest site. Opposition leaders were also detained during a demonstration outside Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s residence against the violence perpetrated on students.³⁴

12. Social media has been crucial in disseminating on-ground information regarding the CJP-led protests and the State’s response, including instances of police brutality.³⁵ However, the government has deployed internet shutdowns³⁶ and has attempted to remove social media content relating to the protest,³⁷ which is likely to affect the availability of evidence of unlawful State action.
13. The CJP suspended its protest on 25 July after Dharmendra Pradhan tendered his resignation as education minister, and upon receiving assurances that families of students who died by suicide after cancellation of the NEET would receive

²⁶ ‘Indian activist linked to Cockroach party moved to hospital after 20-day hunger strike’, The Guardian, 18 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘If They Can Do This To a Scientist Like Wangchuk, What Hope Is There For Us Students?’, Jantar Mantar Resonates With Anger’, The Wire, 18 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

²⁷ ‘Pellets’, ‘shocks’, ‘batons with nails’: Injuries of those at Cockroach march to Parliament tell tales’, The Telegraph Online, 24 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

²⁸ ‘Senior cop removed from Jantar Mantar after video of him slapping woman goes viral’, The Indian Express, 23 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘India: Excessive Force Used Against Student Protesters’, Human Rights Watch, 23 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

²⁹ ‘Jantar Mantar deployment: CRPF personnel without name tags sparks criticism from experts’, Hindustan Times, 25 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘Why are police in plainclothes deployed for crowd control? Is it legal?’, India Today, 22 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

³⁰ ‘I won’t stop fighting,’ says ‘cockroach’ protester after alleged detention’, BBC, 30 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘India’s Cockroach movement threatens to restart protests after mass student arrests’, The Guardian, 28 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

³¹ ‘Aren’t you ashamed to call us terrorists’: CJP’s Dipke slams Pradhan; appears before MeitY over blocking of X account’, The New Indian Express, 24 June 2026 (available [here](#)).

³² ‘Why police surveillance and facial recognition at Jantar Mantar are under legal challenge’, The Indian Express, 25 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

³³ ‘Chaos, frustration among commuters as 16 key Metro stations around Jantar Mantar shut’, The Indian Express, 23 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘Police Stop Autorickshaws From Reaching Jantar Mantar, Don’t Say Why’, The Wire, 23 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

³⁴ ‘Police detain Indian opposition leader Gandhi as protests continue to grow’, Al Jazeera, 21 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

³⁵ See for example Instagram handles @cockroachjantaparty and @peektv_in.

³⁶ ‘Telecom Companies ‘Confirm’ Delhi Internet Shutdown Order, Government Yet to Publish It’, The Wire, 21 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

³⁷ ‘Delhi Police Asks Social Media Platforms to Remove Posts Targeting PM Modi: Reports’, The Wire, 27 July 2026 (available [here](#)); ‘Big Brother watching? Political leaders, digital rights advocates raise alarm over takedown of CJP protest reels’, Deccan Herald, 7 August 2026 (available [here](#)).

compensation and protestors would not be prosecuted.³⁸ However, the State authorities' excessive use of force is subject to scrutiny and litigation. The Supreme Court recently issued orders in the PIL filed on 27 July seeking a ban on the use of metallic pellet guns. The petition was filed by a former intelligence officer and two peaceful protestors who suffered severe pellet gun injuries on 20 July. On 30 July, the Supreme Court heard the petition and remarked that the use of pellet guns could not be banned until the relevant regulations, which permit their use for crowd control in exceptional circumstances, are amended. However, it ordered the central government to preserve ammunition logs of RAF personnel deployed during the protests, and the Delhi government to provide medical care to the injured persons.³⁹ On 3 August, the Court indicated that it would frame a protocol governing the use of pellet guns.⁴⁰ The matter will next be heard on 18 August.

Applicable international law and standards

Article 21 of the ICCPR

14. Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which India is a party⁴¹, recognises the right of peaceful assembly. It further states: "No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."⁴²
15. The Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly under Article 21 of the ICCPR lays down the following principles:⁴³
 - a. Only the minimum force necessary may be used where required for a legitimate law enforcement purpose during an assembly. Law enforcement may not use greater force than is proportionate to the objective.
 - b. In case an assembly needs to be dispersed (which may only be done in exceptional cases, in compliance with domestic and international law), any force used should as far as possible be directed against a specific individual or group engaged in or threatening violence.

³⁸ "We have done it," CJP founder breaks the news at protest site, says 'youth will talk about jobs, the future', The Indian Express, 26 July 2026 (available [here](#)); 'India's 'cockroach' protest called off after education minister quits', BBC, 25 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

³⁹ 'Pellet gun use legal till rules allowing it held unconstitutional: Supreme Court', 31 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁴⁰ "Will Lay Down Protocol": Pellet Guns Under Supreme Court Lens After Jantar Mantar Protests', The Times of India, 3 August 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁴¹ UN Treaty Body Database, 'View the ratification status by country or by treaty' (available [here](#)).

⁴² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966 by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) (available [here](#)), Article 21.

⁴³ Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21) (available [here](#)), paras. 79, 85, 86 and 87.

- c. Force likely to cause more than negligible injury should not be used against individuals or groups who are passively resisting.
 - d. Less lethal weapons with wide-area effects, such as tear gas and water cannons, tend to have indiscriminate effects. Such weapons should be used only as a measure of last resort, following a verbal warning, and with adequate opportunity given for assembly participants to disperse.
16. At the outset, it appears that the use of pellet guns during the ‘Sansad Chalo’ march was not a restriction placed on the right of peaceful assembly ‘in conformity with the law’, as required by Article 21 of the ICCPR. It was argued before the Supreme Court during the hearing of the PIL on 3 August that from 1967 till date, there is no standing order or regulation of the Delhi Police mentioning or permitting the use of pellet guns (it was stated that if any such order exists, the State should place it before the Court).⁴⁴ Further, the Inspector General of the RAF reportedly said to her personnel that the ‘force gradient’ adopted for crowd control during 20 July’s ‘Sansad Chalo’ assembly did not comply with prescribed standards and RAF training. It appears that the personnel were also not properly briefed before their deployment to Jantar Mantar, and after 20 July it was decided that projectile action guns, anti-riot guns, electric shock weapons and electric shields would not be provided to RAF personnel deployed in this context.⁴⁵
17. The use of metallic pellet guns on 20 July was also unnecessary and disproportionate, and therefore a flagrant violation of Article 21 of the ICCPR. As demonstrated in paragraph 10 above, metallic pellet guns are lethal weapons. Sources indicate that the persons who suffered pellet injuries were neither provoking violence nor being aggressive, and were even retreating, and the use of lethal weapons in such a scenario was clearly inappropriate and unlawful. Even if metallic pellet guns are considered to be ‘less lethal weapons with wide area effects’, it is clear that the guidance set out in General Comment No.37 of the Human Rights Committee was not complied with during the ‘Sansad Chalo’ protest. No warnings were given before the pellet guns were deployed, and assembly participants were given no opportunity to disperse before the pellets were indiscriminately fired into the crowd. Pellet guns were also not used as a measure of last resort - water cannons,⁴⁶ which when used in compliance with international standards may have been less likely to cause harm, were not deployed. Further, even if some protestors were breaching barricades or using stones (as authorities claim and the CJP contests⁴⁷), security personnel could have taken targeted and proportionate measures against those particular individuals or groups to the extent necessary to contain unrest.

⁴⁴ X handle @barandbench, 3 August 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁴⁵ ‘Force gradient adopted for crowd control not per standards: RAF on Sansad Chalo march’, The Indian Express, 26 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

⁴⁶ Yashovardhan Azad and Ors. v. Union of India and Ors., Writ Petition No. 917 of 2026, para.4(F).

⁴⁷ ‘India's ‘cockroach’ protest continues a day after police crackdown’, BBC, 21 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

Article 7 of the ICCPR

18. India is also bound by the prohibitions articulated in Article 7 of the ICCPR: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”⁴⁸ Even though India is not a signatory to the Convention Against Torture, Article 1 of that instrument is instructive in understanding the definition of ‘torture’ in international law: “[...] any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”⁴⁹ (underlining added.)
19. The Human Rights Committee has clarified that no justification or extenuating circumstances can excuse a violation of article 7 for any reasons, including orders from superiors.⁵⁰ The Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment has also emphasised that the protection against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment cannot be lost “under any circumstances whatsoever, including in the context of violent riots or unlawful protests.”⁵¹
20. In the specific context of the ‘Sansad Chalo’ protest, the shooting of metallic pellets by Indian security forces and the intentional (or at least reasonably foreseeable) injuring of peaceful protestors for the purposes of intimidating or punishing protestors amounts to torture, or at the very least to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. This remains the case even if claims that the assembly was unlawful or violent⁵² are accepted.
21. Furthermore, in general, the use of such weapons in the context of civilian assemblies should be considered to amount to torture (or at least cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment) in violation of Article 7 of the ICCPR.
22. In its 2017 report, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or

⁴⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966 by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) (available [here](#)), Article 21.

⁴⁹ Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted on 10 December 1984 by General Assembly resolution 39/46 (available [here](#)), Article 1.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 20: Article 7 (Prohibition of torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment), 1992 (available [here](#)), para. 3.

⁵¹ Extra-custodial use of force and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 20 July 2017, A/72/178 (available [here](#)), para. 15.

⁵² ‘India's ‘cockroach’ protest continues a day after police crackdown’, BBC, 21 July 2026 (available [here](#)).

degrading treatment or punishment opined that: “[...] a weapon has to be considered as inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading if it is either specifically designed or of a nature (that is, of no other practical use than) to: (a) employ unnecessary, excessive or otherwise unlawful force against persons; or (b) inflict pain and suffering on powerless individuals.”⁵³ In the context of ‘less lethal’ weapons, the Special Rapporteur clarified that: “While the indiscriminate nature of a weapon alone does not necessarily make it cruel, inhuman or degrading, it may do so in conjunction with the gravity of its effects (for example, certain kinetic impact projectiles) or with the circumstances in which it is being used (for example, tear gas in closed confinements).”⁵⁴

23. These requirements are clearly satisfied in the case of law enforcement’s use of pellet guns shooting metallic pellets in the context of civilian assemblies or crowds. As mentioned in paragraphs 9 and 10, the OHCHR and a UN mandate have repeatedly documented the grave physical and mental impacts of the use of metallic pellet guns in this context and commented on their indiscriminate and unlawful nature.
 - a. The 2018 and 2019 reports of the OHCHR recorded severe injuries and deaths caused by the use of pellet guns in Jammu and Kashmir. The reports classify these guns as highly dangerous and document impacts such as multiple deaths, serious injuries of hundreds of civilians including visual impairment, incidental deaths and injuries, and mental health impacts on victims, such as psychological trauma.⁵⁵
 - b. OHCHR’s 2019 report on Chile also recorded injuries, including ocular trauma, from the use of pellets (including pellets containing lead).⁵⁶
 - c. A 2025 OHCHR report on Bangladesh reported on the indiscriminate use of shotguns loaded with lethal metal pellets, including against protestors, children and students. Recorded impacts included several deaths (often caused deliberately) and injuries to the head, neck, chest and limbs.⁵⁷
 - d. The UN Fact Finding Mission on Iran in its 2025 and 2026 reports also documented the brutal use of metallic pellets against protestors, including women and children, that have caused severe injuries (including to genitalia)

⁵³ Extra-custodial use of force and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 20 July 2017, A/72/178 (available [here](#)), para. 51.

⁵⁴ Extra-custodial use of force and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 20 July 2017, A/72/178 (available [here](#)), para. 55.

⁵⁵ OHCHR, ‘Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan’, 14 June 2018 (available [here](#)), paras. 79-85 and para. 169(h) (recommendation to Indian authorities); OHCHR, ‘Update of the Situation of Human Rights in Indian-Administered Kashmir and Pakistan-Administered Kashmir from May 2018 to April 2019’, 8 July 2019 (available [here](#)), paras. 76-79 and para. 183(h) (recommendation to Indian authorities).

⁵⁶ OHCHR, Report of the Mission to Chile 30 October-22 November 2019 (available [here](#)), Section 4 (page 12).

⁵⁷ OHCHR, Fact Finding Report: Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh 12 February 2025 (available [here](#)), paras. 37, 66, case 1 (page 19), 103, case 3 (page 25), 106, 110, case 4 (page 29), case 5 (page 31), 186, 188, 207 etc.

and even death.⁵⁸

24. With its 2023 report, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment presented a list of equipment identified as being inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading and therefore considered to be prohibited.⁵⁹ These included ‘ammunition containing multiple non-metallic kinetic impact projectiles’ and ‘automatic/multi-barrel launchers firing kinetic impact projectiles’, which the Special Rapporteur felt fulfil no legitimate law enforcement purpose that cannot be achieved through other means.⁶⁰ This criticism applies at least equally to the use of pellet guns shooting metallic pellets, which should be considered inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading, and prohibited under international law.
25. It is therefore clear that the use of pellet guns firing metallic pellets to police civilian assemblies - generally as well as in the context of the ‘Sansad Chalo’ protest - amounts to torture under Article 7 of the ICCPR, or at least to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

UN standards on the use of force in law enforcement

26. The 1979 UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials states that law enforcement officials must respect and protect human dignity and uphold the human rights of all persons. They may use force only when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty, and they may not inflict any act of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.⁶¹
27. Building on this Code of Conduct, the 1990 UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (**UN Basic Principles**) lay out the following key principles on the use of force by law enforcement:⁶²
- a. Law enforcement officials shall, as far as possible, apply non-violent means before using force. They may use force only if other means are ineffective or without promise.
 - b. If the lawful use of force is unavoidable, law enforcement officials shall, among other things, exercise restraint and act proportionately to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved, and

⁵⁸ Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2026, A/HRC/61/60 (available [here](#)), paras. 32, 42; Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, 14 March 2025, A/HRC/58/63 (available [here](#)), paras. 46, 47, 56, 71, 87.

⁵⁹ Annex I to Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 24 August 2023, A/78/324 (available [here](#)), paras. 2.6 and 2.7.

⁶⁰ Annex I to the Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 24 August 2023, A/78/324 (available [here](#)).

⁶¹ Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, adopted on 17 December 1979 by General Assembly Resolution 34/169 (available [here](#)), Articles 2, 3 and 5.

⁶² Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, adopted on 07 September 1990 by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana, Cuba, 27 August to 7 September 1990 (available [here](#)), principles 4, 5, 3 and 13 respectively.

- minimize damage and injury, and respect and preserve human life.
- c. The deployment of non-lethal incapacitating weapons should be carefully evaluated to minimize the risk of endangering uninvolved persons, and the use of such weapons should be carefully controlled.
 - d. In dispersing unlawful but non-violent assemblies, law enforcement officials shall avoid the use of force or, where that is not practicable, shall restrict such force to the minimum extent necessary.
28. In its 2015 guidance on the UN Basic Principles, Amnesty International explained that pellet-firing shot guns pose a high risk of causing serious injuries, such as eye injuries, to targeted as well as third persons. It further highlighted that: “These grave risks are almost impossible to control while the objective – e.g. dealing with violent persons in a crowd control situation – could be achieved in a less harmful way with other type of devices that allow for better targeting or more control over the harm caused (e.g. targeted shots with kinetic impact projectiles aiming at violent persons).” Accordingly, it recommended that pellet firing shot guns be prohibited in law enforcement.⁶³
29. Furthermore, the 2020 UN Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement specifically addresses the use of multiple kinetic impact projectiles and discourages the use of metal pellets. It states that: “Multiple projectiles fired at the same time are inaccurate and, in general, their use cannot comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality. Metal pellets, such as those fired from shotguns, should never be used.”⁶⁴
30. It is therefore evident that, in general, the use of pellet guns shooting metallic pellets goes against necessity and proportionality standards set out in international law and standards. A 2015 research report by Omega Research Foundation and Amnesty International also recommended that “[a]mmunition firing multiple projectiles is notoriously inaccurate, indiscriminate and arbitrary and should be prohibited”.⁶⁵ Further, in the specific context of the largely peaceful ‘Sansad Chalo’ assembly, the use of such guns without any warning, which indiscriminately and gravely injured multiple peaceful protestors blatantly violates the necessity and proportionality requirements set out in the above UN principles. This remains the case even if the authorities claim that the assembly was unlawful due to denial of police permission (a claim which is itself incompatible with international human rights principles).

Other UN sources on the use of ‘less lethal’ weapons

⁶³ Amnesty International, ‘Use of Force: Guidelines for Implementation of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials’, August 2015, (available [here](#)), commentary to principles 2 and 3, pages 138-139.

⁶⁴ OHCHR, Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement, 2020 (available [here](#)), para.7.5.6.

⁶⁵ Omega Research Foundation and Amnesty International, ‘The Human Rights Impact of Less Lethal Weapons and Other Law Enforcement Equipment’, 2015 (available [here](#)), page 17.

31. Even assuming that metallic pellet guns are ‘less lethal’ weapons (alternatively to the position adopted in paragraph 10 above), it is clear that even the basic guidance issued by Special Rapporteurs for such weapons was not followed in the case of the ‘Sansad Chalo’ protest.
32. A 2016 joint report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on the proper management of assemblies highlighted that less-lethal weapons must be scientifically tested and approved, and they must be used responsibly by well-trained law enforcement officials. This is because they may be lethal or injurious if not used in compliance with international law and human rights standards or used incorrectly. The Special Rapporteurs urged States to establish international protocols for training on and use of less-lethal weapons.⁶⁶
33. The Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in its 2022 report emphasised that the use of less lethal weapons must also comply with principles of necessity and proportionality. Their use must be a measure of last resort and minimum harm should be ensured. The Special Rapporteur explained that the use of such weapons is likely to cause injury and hence, it can be considered proportionate only if used to counter the threat of a similar or graver harm. The mandate expressly stated that their unnecessary or excessive use may constitute torture or ill-treatment or violate the right to life.⁶⁷

Requests to the Special Rapporteurs

34. We request the Special Rapporteurs to issue a public statement addressing the unlawful use of pellet guns in the context of the ‘Sansad Chalo’ march on 20 July 2026, and highlighting India’s flagrant violation of international law in this regard.
35. We urge the Special Rapporteurs to also make recommendations to India to comply with its international law obligations, as set out in paragraph 37 below.
36. We also encourage the Special Rapporteurs to make a statement and/or mention in future reports that the use of pellet guns shooting metallic pellets in the context of civilian assemblies is an unlawful use of force under international law.

Recommendations to India

37. Indian authorities must, in the context of the ‘Sansad Chalo’ protest in Delhi on 20

⁶⁶ Joint report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on the proper management of assemblies, 16 February 2016, A/HRC/31/66 (available [here](#)), para. 55.

⁶⁷ Protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests during crisis situations, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, 16 May 2022, A/HRC/50/42 (available [here](#)), para. 41.

July 2026:

- a. Effectively and impartially investigate the use of pellet guns firing metallic pellets.
 - b. Offer an effective remedy to all victims who suffered physical or mental injury, including but not limited to adequate compensation.
 - c. Hold those responsible for the deployment of pellet guns accountable.
 - d. Guarantee non-repetition, including by enacting all relevant legislation, guidelines or policies to ban the use of pellet guns firing metallic pellets in the context of civilian assemblies.
 - e. Reaffirm its commitment to protecting the right to peaceful assembly and the prohibition on torture and on cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in accordance with its international law obligations.
38. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India is urged to return a positive order in the PIL seeking decommissioning or ban on the use of pellet guns firing metallic pellets in the context of civilian assemblies (or at least find the use of such guns in the context of the 'Sansad Chalo' march on 20 July unlawful). It is clear that the use of such weapons in this context violates international law standards, particularly those on the necessity and proportionality of use of force by the State, and those on the prohibition of torture and of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

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