



## **Introduction**

This report, submitted by the NGO Omnum des Liberté aims to analyze police practices and detention conditions in France, with a view to the State party's examination at the 82nd session of the Committee against Torture (CAT). It is based on testimonies and documented investigations, and compares them with France's obligations under the Convention against Torture and the Committee's previous reports.

## **Analysis of the facts**

### **1. Police searches:**

The testimonies gathered describe searches of yoga centers carried out with disproportionate force, often accompanied by intimidating behavior and violations of fundamental rights. For example, during the simultaneous raids on November 28, 2023, heavily armed and hooded police burst into several homes, breaking down doors with battering rams, despite the availability of keys. The occupants, surprised in the early hours of the morning, were forced to leave their rooms in their pyjamas or underwear, without time to get dressed, and were kept in the courtyard in the freezing cold of -1 degrees for almost an hour. Some witnesses, such as Celina Angelescu, reported being photographed by the police with their personal telephones, without any explanation as to how these photographs were used. Others, like Lucia Papava, were subjected to humiliating taunts, with police officers referring to their home as a "whore house". These interventions have also been marked by arbitrary seizures of personal belongings, such as documents, food supplements and personal effects, without the issue of a report. These actions are a reminder of the concerns raised in the face of institutional violence, where the authorities, under the pretext of investigations, fail to respect the rights of individuals or guarantee adequate supervision of police practices.

### **2. Detention conditions :**

Those arrested report degrading conditions of detention, marked by flagrant violations of their fundamental rights. Several testimonies describe deprivation of food and water. For example, one woman reported being held at the police station from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. without being provided with any food, despite her repeated requests and offer to pay for

something to eat. Another person mentioned that she had been given a glass of water, but not enough, and that her further requests had been ignored. These deprivations are reminiscent of a lack of institutional recognition of prisoners' basic needs, comparable to situations where the needs of victims of domestic violence are neglected.

Detention conditions also included prolonged exposure to the cold without appropriate clothing. Several witnesses described being forced to stay in unheated rooms or outside, sometimes for hours at a time, dressed only in light clothing. One woman reported being kept in a freezing cell, where a cold wind blew through a grate, and where she had only a blanket in to protect herself. Others mentioned being forced to stay in the courtyard, in near-zero temperatures, without being able to retrieve their coats or warm clothes, even though these were within easy reach.

Access to a lawyer was also systematically denied, despite repeated requests. One woman explained that she was told she had no right to a lawyer because she was considered a witness, not an accused. Another reported that a translator had advised her to sign documents in French, without translation or explanation, claiming that this would be "better for her". These practices violate the fundamental right to a fair defense and are reminiscent of structural shortcomings observed in other contexts, such as the limited access to legal protections for incest victims.

Finally, psychological pressure was exerted to force detainees to sign untranslated documents. Several witnesses described interrogations where investigators insisted that they sign statements written in French, without allowing them to read them carefully or understand them. One woman reported that police officers shouted at her to sign quickly, while a translator told her repeatedly that there would be "no consequences" if she signed. This pressure, combined with the lack of translation and intimidation, created a climate of psychological coercion, incompatible with international standards for the treatment of detainees.

### 3. **Interrogations** :

Interrogations were carried out in an atmosphere of coercion, marked by intimidating practices and violations of the fundamental rights of those questioned. For example, several testimonies describe psychological pressure exerted on individuals to force them to sign statements they did not understand. One woman reported that a translator told her to sign a document in French, claiming that "it was better for her", without providing a translation or explanation of the content. In another interrogation, a person was confronted by police officers who promised that she would be released if she answered "just ten questions". In reality, the interrogation lasted over two hours, with repetitive and tendentious questions aimed at incriminating the person.

Interrogations were often accompanied by implicit or explicit threats. One woman reported that police officers shouted at her to sign documents quickly, while insinuating that she could be detained longer if she refused. Other witnesses described intrusive and humiliating questions, particularly about their private and sexual lives, such as "did you have sex for money?" or "did you have sex with men and women in this apartment?". These questions, asked in a context of psychological pressure, were

aimed at establishing a link between the yoga practitioners and serious criminal activities, without providing any concrete evidence.

Moreover, interrogations often took place without the presence of a lawyer, despite repeated requests from those being questioned. One woman explained that she had explicitly asked for a lawyer before answering questions, but was told that as a "witness", she was not entitled to legal assistance. This lack of procedural guarantees reinforced the interviewees' sense of vulnerability and injustice.

These practices are reminiscent of the institutional injustices observed in other contexts, where vulnerable individuals, such as protective parents in cases of domestic violence, are subjected to coercive and discriminatory treatment, without benefiting from adequate legal protections.

#### **4. Violations of articles of the Convention against Torture**

##### **Articles 1 and 16:**

Inhuman treatment (basic deprivation and psychological pressure) can be assimilated to violations of these articles.

##### **Article 2:**

Failure to protect detainees' fundamental rights, such as immediate access to legal assistance.

##### **Article 11:**

Lack of oversight of police practices, similar to the lack of due diligence in the institutional response to domestic violence.

#### **5. CAT report CAT/C/FRA/QPR/8**

The previous report of the Committee against Torture (CAT), as mentioned in document CAT/C/FRA/QPR/8, had already highlighted major concerns about the excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies and the inadequacy of protection measures for vulnerable people. These concerns are directly echoed in the current accounts documented in our report, particularly with regard to violent searches and degrading conditions of detention.

In its previous concluding observations (CAT/C/FRA/CO/7), the Committee recommended that France step up its efforts to prevent any excessive use of force by the police and gendarmerie, particularly during arrests and law enforcement operations. For example, the Committee stressed the need to ensure that victims of police brutality can lodge complaints without fear of reprisals, and that investigations are carried out independently and diligently. These recommendations remain relevant today, as evidenced by accounts of raids on yoga centers, where heavily armed law enforcement officers used disproportionate methods, such as destruction of personal property and physical and psychological intimidation. These practices, far from being isolated, reflect a systemic problem already identified by the Committee.

In addition, the previous report stressed the importance of guaranteeing detention conditions in line with international standards, particularly in terms of access to legal counsel, medical care and respect for human dignity. However, current testimonies show that these shortcomings persist. For example, people arrested during searches have reported being deprived of food and water for long periods, kept in cold cells without appropriate clothing, and denied immediate

access to a lawyer, despite repeated requests. These facts confirm that the Committee's recommendations have not been fully implemented.

Finally, the Committee had also expressed concern about stigmatization and discrimination against specific groups, notably religious and spiritual minorities. In our report, the searches targeting yoga practitioners, wrongly equated with sectarian activities, illustrate this problem. These interventions, often justified by institutional prejudices, reinforce the Committee's conclusions that France must take concrete measures to protect minorities against abuse and discrimination.

In summary, the current accounts confirm the persistent shortcomings identified in the CAT's previous report, particularly with regard to the excessive use of force, inhumane detention conditions and the stigmatization of minorities. These elements underline the urgency for France to implement the Committee's recommendations in order to guarantee respect for the fundamental rights of all people, without discrimination.

## **6. Ms Nazila Ghanea "*Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Prohibition of Torture*",**

Ms Nazila Ghanea's recently published report, entitled "*Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Prohibition of Torture*", submitted to the 58<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council (HRC).

The report highlights the links between the stigmatization of religious minorities and human rights violations, pointing out that this stigmatization can lead to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, even torture. Ms. Ghanea states that "***institutional prejudices shape an unjust reality for minorities, obscuring their protection under unfounded prejudices***"

This analysis finds a direct echo in the situations documented in France, where raids targeting yoga practitioners, wrongly equated with sectarian activities, illustrate how spiritual beliefs can be unjustly criminalized. Ms. Ghanea's report also points out that the marginalization of religious minorities by public institutions contributes to an environment conducive to abuse, reflecting the testimonies gathered during police raids in France.

## **7. Recommendations**

1. Strengthen supervision of police practices to ensure respect for fundamental rights.
2. Ensure immediate access to a lawyer for all detainees.
3. Train law enforcement officers in international human rights obligations.
4. Set up an independent mechanism to investigate police abuse.
5. Adopt measures to prevent the stigmatization of religious minorities, in line with the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

## **8. Conclusion**

The accounts demonstrate violations of France's obligations under the Convention against Torture. It is imperative that concrete action be taken to remedy these shortcomings, and guarantee respect for the fundamental rights of all people, whatever their beliefs.

Source :

Human Rights Without Frontiers

<https://hrwf.eu/france-police-raids-on-romanian-yoga-centers-one-year-later/>

<https://hrwf.eu/france-disproportionate-widescale-police-raids-against-yoga-practitioners-how-did-start-inquiry/>

<https://hrwf.eu/france-police-raids-on-peaceful-yoga-practitioners-and-abuses-in-police-custody/>

<https://hrwf.eu/france-i-was-a-victim-of-a-police-raid-and-was-abusively-detained-for-two-days-and-two-nights/>

<https://hrwf.eu/france-spectacular-simultaneous-swat-raids-on-romanian-yoga-centers-ii-fact-checking-of-the-operation-in-buthiers/>

<https://hrwf.eu/france-spectacular-simultaneous-swat-raids-on-romanian-yoga-centers-in-france-fact-checking-i/>

UN SR FORB Ms Nazila Ghanea

[Freedom of religion or belief and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment - Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#)

CAT/C/ENG/QPR/8

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CAT/C/FRA/CO/7

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