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A lit window in the dark is covered by mesh and metal bars with a pink rag doll hanging from

A rag doll in Kherson, Ukraine, is attached to the window of a cell at a preliminary detention center Nov. 16, 2022, which, as Ukrainians say, was used by Russian service members to jail and torture people. (CNS photo/Murad Sezer, Reuters)

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Pope Francis called on the international community to work concretely against torture and to guarantee support to victims and their families.

"Let us put a stop to this horror of torture. It is essential to put the dignity of the person above all else," the pope said in a video message released May 30 by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network.

The network posts a short video of the pope offering his specific prayer intention each month. For the month of June, the pope dedicated his prayer intention to the abolition of torture.

The International Day in Support of Victims of Torture is June 26 to highlight the day when the U.N. Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment came into effect in 1987. While torture is prohibited by international law and is illegal in most countries, it is still practiced worldwide.

Alice Edwards, U.N. special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, said, "The national duty to investigate torture is alarmingly, universally, under-implemented." Every nation has a duty to criminalize and investigate allegations of torture, prosecute or extradite suspects, and sentence offenders with penalties that reflect the gravity of the offence, she told the U.N. Human Rights Council in March 2023.

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In his video message, the pope asked, "How is it possible that the human capacity for cruelty is so huge?" Torture is "not something new. Let's think of how Jesus himself was tortured and crucified."

While there are extremely violent forms of torture, "others are more sophisticated, such as degrading someone, dulling the senses, or mass detentions in conditions so inhumane that they take away the dignity of the person," he said.

Victims are not seen as persons, but as "things" that "can be mistreated mercilessly, causing death or permanent psychological and physical harm lasting a lifetime," the pope said.

"Let us pray that the international community commit itself concretely to abolish torture, guaranteeing support to victims and their families," he added.