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Iraq: Detainees Describe Torture in Secret Jail

Prosecute Officials Involved at All Levels

April 27, 2010

(Baghdad) - Detainees in a secret Baghdad detention facility were hung upside-down, deprived of air, kicked, whipped, beaten, given electric shocks, and sodomized, Human Rights Watch said today. Iraq should thoroughly investigate and prosecute all government and security officials responsible, Human Rights Watch said.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 42 of the men in the Al Rusafa Detention Center on April 26, 2010. They were among about 300 detainees transferred from the secret facility in the old Muthanna airport in West Baghdad to Al Rusafa into a special block of 19 cage-type cells over the past several weeks, after the existence of the secret prison was revealed.

The men's stories were credible and consistent. Most of the 300 displayed fresh scars and injuries they said were a result of routine and systematic torture they had experienced at the hands of interrogators at Muthanna. All were accused of aiding and abetting terrorism, and many said they were forced to sign false confessions.



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What happened at Muthanna is an example of the horrendous abuse Iraqi leaders say they want to leave behind. Everyone responsible, from the top on down, needs to be held accountable.

Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at
Human Rights Watch

IRAQ

Rights Group Reports Abuses In Secret Iraq Prisons

All Things Considered
Apr 28, 2010 | [More on NPR.org](http://www.npr.org)

A Human Rights Watch report says detainees at a secret prison in Iraq were subjected to routine and systematic torture. The Baghdad prison was under the control of the Shiite-led Iraqi government; the detainees are Sunni. And the revelations are already inflaming sectarian tensions. Melissa Block talks to Samer Muscati, a researcher with Human Rights Watch, who interviewed several of the detainees.

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"The horror we found suggests torture was the norm in Muthanna," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "The government needs to prosecute all of those responsible for this systematic brutality."

The Iraqi authorities should establish an independent and impartial inquiry to investigate what happened at Muthanna, determine who was responsible, and prosecute them, Human Rights Watch said, including anyone in authority who failed to prevent the

torture. The government also needs to ensure that courts will not admit any confessions obtained through torture.

The men interviewed said the Iraqi army detained them between September and December 2009 after sweeps in and around Mosul, a stronghold of Sunni Arab militants, including Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. They said torture was most intense during their first week at Muthanna. Several well-informed sources told Human Rights Watch that this secret facility was under the jurisdiction of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's military office.

All the detainees interviewed described the same methods of torture employed by their Iraqi interrogators. The jailers suspended the detainees handcuffed and blindfolded upside down by means of two bars, one placed behind their calves and the other against their shins. All had terrible scabs and bruising on their legs. The interrogators then kicked, whipped and beat the detainees. Interrogators also placed a dirty plastic bag over the detainee's head to close off his air supply. Typically, when the detainee passed out from this ordeal, his interrogators awakened him with electric shocks to his genitals or other parts of his body.

During the interrogations, security officials mocked the detainees and called them "terrorists" and "Ba'athists." To stop the torture, detainees said, they either offered fake confessions or signed or fingerprinted a prepared confession without having read it. Even after they confessed, many said, torture persisted.

The detainees told Human Rights Watch of other torture methods as well. They described how interrogators and security officials sodomized some detainees with broomsticks and pistol barrels and, the detainees said, raped younger detainees, who were then sent to a different detention site. Some young men said they had been forced to perform oral sex on interrogators and guards. Interrogators also forced some detainees to molest one another.

Security officials whipped detainees with heavy cables, pulled out fingernails and toenails, burned them with acid and cigarettes, and smashed their teeth. If detainees still refused to confess, interrogators would threaten to rape their wives, mothers, sisters, or daughters. The interrogation sessions usually lasted three or four hours and occurred every three or four days.

Muthanna held more than 430 prisoners before their transfer to other detention facilities earlier this month. For months, nobody knew their whereabouts. Detainees had no access to their families or legal counsel. They were not issued any official documents or even a detainee or case number. An investigative judge heard cases in a room down the hall from one of the torture chambers in the facility, they said.

After the *Los Angeles Times* first reported the abuse at the Muthanna detention facility on April 19, the Iraqi government said it would investigate the torture claims and has arrested three army officers in connection with the abuse.

"What happened at Muthanna is an example of the horrendous abuse Iraqi leaders say they want to leave behind," Stork said. "Everyone responsible, from the top on down, needs to be held accountable."

The following are excerpts from the detainees' testimony:

Detainee A was captured with 33 others in Mosul on the night of September 17, 2009: "The interrogators would tie my arms behind my back and blindfold me before they would hang me upside down and beat me. They would suffocate me with a bag until I passed out and would wake me with an electric shock to my genitals. Even after they forced me to confess that I killed ten people, the torture never stopped. Ten days before I was transferred out on April 8, I endured a horrific beating for speaking to an inspection team from the Human Rights Ministry. After they left, the prison staff beat me so badly that I urinated blood."

Detainee B is a pediatrician who saw one of his cellmates dragged out for a torture session on January 18, 2010. When they brought him back to the cell, the doctor noticed swelling above his liver and suspected internal bleeding and told the guards that the man needed immediate medical attention. The guards took the tortured man out but returned him an hour later saying that he was fine. He died in the cell an hour later.

Detainee C was arrested in September in Mosul: "The torture sessions lasted for hours on end. The guards would come into our cell and grab three or four detainees at a time. They would walk us to the interrogation room to begin the abuse. They would beat us for hours and so badly that we could not stand up so they would have to drag us back to our cells. They would let us recover for three days before the cycle of torture began anew."

Detainee D, a former general in the Iraqi army and now a British citizen, who is in a wheelchair, was arrested on December 7, after he returned to Mosul from London to find his son, who had been detained. His jailers refused him medicine for his diabetes and high blood pressure. "I was beaten up severely, especially on my head," he told Human Rights Watch. "They broke one of my teeth during the beatings. ... Ten people tortured me; four from the investigation commission and six soldiers. They applied electricity to my penis and sodomized me with a stick. I was forced to sign a confession that they wouldn't let me read."

Iraqi soldiers arrested Detainee E, a 21-year-old, on December 19 at his home in Mosul: "During the first eight days they tortured me daily. They would put a bag on my head and start to kick my stomach and beat me all over my body. They threatened that if I didn't confess, they would bring my sisters and mother to be raped. I heard him on the cellphone giving orders to rape my sisters and mother." During one torture session, the man, who was blindfolded and handcuffed, was stripped and ordered to stroke another detainee's penis. After he was forced to the floor, the other detainee was forced on top of him. "It hurt when it started to penetrate me. The guards were all laughing and saying, 'He's very tight, let's bring some soap!' When I experienced the pain, I asked them to stop and that I would confess. Although I confessed to the killings, I mentioned fake names since I never killed anyone. So the torture continued even after I confessed because they suspected my confession was false." One of the guards also forced him to have oral sex.

Detainee F was arrested with his brother in Mosul on December 16. His interrogators strung him upside down and severely beat him with his eyes blindfolded and his hands tied behind his back. He suffered broken ribs from the beatings and urinated blood for days. The interrogators threatened to rape his wife if he did not confess. One time he was stripped naked and told to penetrate another naked inmate lying on the floor or that he would otherwise be raped by two male guards.

Detainees G and H, father (59) and son (29) respectively, were arrested at their house in Mosul on September 30. Both endured sessions in which interrogators hung them upside down and beat them. During one session the father was stripped naked in front of the son, and the son was told they if he did not confess they would rape his father. The father was told that if he did not confess they would kill his son. The son was subsequently sodomized with a broomstick and the

guards' fingers.

Detainee I, 24, was arrested on September 30 in Mosul. He still has severe leg injuries and wets his bed after he was sodomized numerous times with a broomstick and pistol. During one session, an interrogator told him that they would rape his mother and sister if he did not confess. During another beating, interrogators hit him so hard that he lost several front teeth.

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