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HRW – Human Rights Watch

Torture of Activists Routine in Congo

The military, police, and intelligence services in the Democratic Republic of Congo (<https://www.hrw.org/africa/democratic-republic-congo>) have routinely tortured political and rights activists, including by gang rape, choking and electric shock, according to an exhaustive new report.

In the report released this week, the UK-based Freedom from Torture documents the extensive use of torture in detention (https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/a_tool_to_silence_torture_to_crush_dissent_in_the_democratic_republic_of_co) in Congo, based on forensic documentation and psychological assessments of Congolese asylum seekers in the United Kingdom.

Freedom from Torture reviewed the medical-legal reports of 74 Congolese, including 49 women and 25 men, detained between 2005 and 2017. Most of the torture cases occurred since 2011, with many from the last presidential election in 2011 and during the recent crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

Human Rights Watch has also documented the systematic use of arbitrary arrest and detention, ill-treatment and frequently torture of suspected political opponents and activists. In the two years following the 2006 elections, security forces tortured many of the estimated 1,000 people arrested (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/11/25/dr-congo-president-brutally-represses-opposition>) for their perceived political opposition and killed about 500 people. In the lead-up to and following the 2011 elections (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/21/dr-congo-24-killed-election-results-announced>), former detainees at Camp Tshatshi, a military base in Kinshasa, described being stripped naked, blasted with cold water, and repeatedly beaten by Republican Guard soldiers, including with wooden bats with nails.

Since 2015, when protests began against President Joseph Kabila's attempts to extend his presidency beyond the constitutionally mandated two-term limit, we have documented the arbitrary arrest of about 2,000 political opposition leaders and supporters and pro-democracy activists. Many were mistreated in detention. In one case, security forces in eastern Congo (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/15/dr-congo-release-7-detained-democracy-activists>) forced an activist to roll in the mud and lie under an outdoor faucet. An intelligence agent opened the tap and water poured into his mouth and eyes for about 10 minutes – a form of near-drowning that amounts to torture.

As the country prepares for presidential elections scheduled for December 23, there's a risk these abusive tactics might intensify. Congolese authorities should immediately release all political opposition members and activists detained arbitrarily, allow independent monitoring of detention sites, and take measures to end the use of torture and ill-treatment. Those responsible for abuses should be held accountable. It's critical that Congo's international partners signal clearly that there will be consequences – such as expanded targeted sanctions – if torture and other abuses continue.

ecoi.net summary:

Article on systematic use of arbitrary arrest and detention, ill-treatment and torture of suspected political opponents and activists



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