

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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| Bilagsnr.: | 1101 |
| Land: | Iran |
| Kilde: | Human Rights Watch |
| Titel: | Iran. Security Forces Rape, Torture, Detainees |
| Udgivet: | 22. april 2024 |
| Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet: | 1. juli 2024 |
| | |



Document #2108609

HRW – Human Rights Watch
(Author)

Iran: Security Forces Rape, Torture, Detainees

Kurdish, Baluch, Azeri, and Other Ethnic Communities Apparently Targeted

(Beirut) – [Iran's](#) security forces raped, tortured, and sexually assaulted detainees while repressing widespread protests in 2022 and 2023, Human Rights Watch said today. The grave abuses are part of a broader pattern of serious human rights violations to repress dissent.

Human Rights Watch investigated abuses against ten detained people from Kurdish, Baluch, and Azeri minority regions that occurred between September and November 2022. Detainees described being raped by security forces and some said they witnessed security forces raping other detainees. In seven of the cases, detainees said that security forces had tortured them to coerce them into making confessions.

“Iranian security forces’ brutality against detained protesters, including rape and torture, are not only egregious crimes, but a weapon of injustice wielded against detainees to coerce them into false confessions,” said [Nahid Naghshbandi](#), acting Iran researcher at Human Rights Watch. “These methods are also a twisted and despicable means of further stigmatizing and repressing marginalized ethnic minorities.”

Human Rights Watch interviewed the survivors by phone between September 2022 and 2023, including five women, three men, and two children. Three shared medical records that supported their accounts.

In December 2023, Amnesty International released a [report](#) that documented that security forces “used rape and other forms of sexual violence” to “intimidate and punish peaceful protesters during the 2022 ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ uprising.” Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the [UN Fact-Finding Mission](#) on Iran have all separately

documented Iranian authorities' use of severe repressive violence in ethnic minority regions.

A Kurdish woman told Human Rights Watch that in November 2022 two men from the security forces raped her while a woman agent held her down and facilitated the rape.

A 24-year-old Kurdish man from West Azerbaijan province said he was severely tortured and raped with a baton by intelligence agency forces in a secret detention center in September 2022. A 30-year-old man from East Azerbaijan province said he was blindfolded and beaten along with other protesters, and he was gang raped with another man by security forces in a van in October 2022.

Human Rights Watch also documented government security forces restraining, blindfolding, and torturing protesters in detention. Authorities beat and sexually assaulted a Baluch woman who witnessed at least two other women being raped in a detention center in Sistan and Baluchistan in October 2022, leaving them physically and psychologically traumatized.

One woman who experienced sexual violence from security forces attempted suicide, while another required surgery for her injuries. A family member of another Baluch woman in her twenties told Human Rights Watch that in October 2022 her relative was raped twice in detention, and after her release she also attempted suicide.

Human Rights Watch previously reported cases of Iranian security forces' use of [torture](#) and sexual assault against men, [women](#), and [children](#), as well as suspicious [deaths](#) in detention. The authorities did not provide medical treatment or even basic hygiene supplies to those assaulted by security forces, exacerbating their long-term injuries, and have not investigated these cases or held anyone accountable for these serious violations.

The United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Iran [should](#) continue to investigate these grave abuses as part of its broader reporting on the Iranian government's serial human rights violations, Human Rights Watch said.

"Accounts of brutal rape and the lasting traumatic consequences of those crimes should mobilize countries to meet the physical and psychological health needs of survivors who have managed to flee Iran," Naghshbandi said. "They should also mobilize Iranians at home and abroad to push for accountability and justice."

Rape, Sexual Assault, and Torture in Sistan and Baluchistan Province

A university student from Sistan and Baluchistan, who, like some others interviewed, asked not to identify her by name, told Human Rights Watch that in October 2022, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) forces arrested her, along with approximately 20 other women, after they protested and shouted anti-government slogans. The forces beat all of the women so severely during their arrest that one woman lost consciousness.

They blindfolded and bound the women, then loaded them into a van and took them to an undisclosed location. The woman described the place they were transferred to as a small room with a low ceiling. Security forces separated them into groups of three, in separate cells.

The security forces detained the women for over a month, during which the women were subjected to torture and sexual violence, including being kicked in their genitals to coerce false confessions that they were involved with political groups. The woman interviewed said that security forces handed her papers with Revolutionary Guard letterhead to write and sign a confession:

When I told the interrogator that I am not affiliated with any political party and will no longer participate in protests, he said: "No, you won't cooperate, I'll have to deal with you differently." Then he called two people and said: "This whore likes to be torn apart." They tore my clothes apart and brutally raped me. I lost consciousness, and when they poured water on my head, I regained consciousness and saw that my entire body was covered in blood.

They blindfolded her and took her to her cell, where her cellmates told her the same thing had happened to them. She said she could see that they were also badly hurt and scared. They told each other that if they get out alive, they would kill themselves.

She said she was raped three times during her approximately 50-day detention, mostly during the first days of her arrest. She was not given any medicine or hygienic supplies:

They didn't even give us a single tissue, let alone medical aid. They only gave us a pill every night ... I didn't know what it was, maybe some sort of a sedative or sleeping pill. They would make us take the pill and wouldn't leave the cell until we swallowed it.

She was forced to sign dozens of pages of confessions without any questions. They accused her of "destroying public property" and "disturbing the security of the population."

She faced charges of “disrupting public order,” “blasphemy,” and “destruction of public property.” She said after she was released, she had an infection in her kidneys and uterus and underwent surgery twice.

Another person interviewed said that a relative of hers, a Baluch woman in her twenties, was arrested and beaten by Revolutionary Guard forces in October 2022 in Sistan and Baluchistan province while participating in a small protest. The security forces informed the detainee’s family about her whereabouts after four days, and she was only allowed to call them herself after nine days. She was in detention for almost a month, facing charges of “blasphemy” and “collaboration with opposition groups,” before being released on bail.

The relative said that the woman was raped twice in detention and was in very poor physical and mental health after her release, during which she attempted suicide. She was rushed to the hospital where she received life-saving treatment. The woman told her relative that nearly 20 other women ages 20 to 26 were detained with her, and she was aware that two others were sexually assaulted and raped.

Sexual Assault in Kermanshah

A 21-year-old Kurdish woman said that in November 2022 she was arrested by security forces while she was walking toward the university campus in Kermanshah with some other students. They were blindfolded and taken to an undisclosed detention center, where two interrogators raped her:

Two men interrogated me, then a woman came and took me to another room. She told me I needed to take off my clothes for a body search and be transferred to the general ward. While I was busy taking off my clothes, two other men came in; one of them grabbed me with that woman while the other raped me. Once the first was done I was already half unconscious and the other man started raping me. After that, another woman came and gave me a paper towel, telling me to clean myself up. She also took me to another room. The next morning, they blindfolded me again and took me to Razi Square, where they threw me out of the car. I managed to make my way back to the dormitory from there.

Sexual Assault in East Azerbaijan Province

Revolutionary Guard plainclothes agents arrested a 30-year-old male protester in October 2022. They took the man and other protesters who were arrested to a mosque courtyard nearby and blindfolded them and started beating them with batons and tasers. The men were then sent into a police van and told to take off all their clothes. Some of them protested, which he said made the security forces angry. The security forces took the man Human Rights Watch interviewed and another man

to a riot control vehicle and forcibly took their clothes off using a taser on their back and behind their knees. Three officers raped both men.

The man interviewed said:

I was blindfolded but I could say that they were raping the other man too since we were next to each other, and I could also hear him crying and begging them to stop. He was in his twenties, and I asked him not to say anything to the others when they took us back. When they took us back, they put us in the van with the others and used pepper spray and closed the doors. After all the beating and torture and rape I felt I was dead and the things I was seeing weren't real.

He was sent to jail in Tabriz, where he was not provided with any medical or hygienic services and finally was released on bail. He had been bleeding from his rectum for days after his release, he said, and is suffering from severe depression. He said he told the judges he had been raped and that one of them responded: "If you don't shut up, I will rape you myself as well."

He faced the charge of "assembly and collusion to commit acts against national security" that ultimately wasn't substantiated, leading to the charge being dropped and his release.

Torture and Sexual Assault in West Azerbaijan Province

On September 29, 2022, Keivan Samadi, a 24-year-old medical student, was arrested in Oshnavieh by plainclothes officers near his home. Three officers approached him in a car under the pretext of asking for directions. When they got close to him, they threatened him with a pistol and ordered him into their car. He said they pushed his head down so he couldn't see where they were taking him and took him to a hidden detention center.

They placed him in a small cell with a dirty blanket and a toilet without any hygiene items, such as soap. He was held alone in this cell for 21 days, and he was only taken out for interrogation. He said that intelligence agents tortured and sexually assaulted him during interrogation, including raping him with a baton, using a taser on his genitals, burning his body hair, severely beating him with batons, and giving him electric shocks that led to bleeding from his left ear. He said he was whipped on the back, resulting in wounds and skin infection on his lower back:

They were from [Iran's Ministry of Interior's Intelligence Agency] in Oshnavieh, I knew this from the papers they gave me to sign a false confession. They kicked me so that I fell from the chair during the interrogation, and they kept kicking me in the stomach and my ear ... and eventually my left ear started bleeding, every day they would

take me and torture me in different ways using the taser on my neck and back. Another day they whipped me 43 times before I lost consciousness, which resulted in bleeding in my back. I asked them for antibiotics, but they didn't give me anything. Once one of the interrogators took a cutter and wanted to cut the middle finger of my right hand when the other one stopped him.

From day 12 they started using a taser on my genitals. On day 16, they took off my pants I thought they are going to use the taser on my genitals again, but they raped me with a baton. I was shocked at that moment and couldn't believe they would do such a thing. I just stood there, speechless, and couldn't even scream because I was mute, as if four people had grabbed my throat so that my voice wouldn't come out."

ecoi.net description:

Detainees raped, tortured and sexually assaulted by security forces while protests in 2022 and 2023

Country:

Iran

Source:

[HRW – Human Rights Watch](#) (Author)

Published:

22 April 2024

Original link:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/22/iran-security-forces-rape-torture-detainees>

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:

English

Available on ecoi.net since:

8 May 2024

Document ID:

2108609

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