

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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(Beirut) [Lebanese](#) authorities should adopt wide-ranging measures to combat torture, including creating a national monitoring body for detention facilities, Human Rights Watch said today on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Recently leaked videos show Internal Security Forces (ISF) officers torturing inmates in Roumieh prison.

The Lebanese government should further bring national laws and practices in compliance with its international obligations to prevent and combat torture. A group of local organizations also issued a joint statement calling on the government to adopt such measures.

The torture captured on video is only the tip of the iceberg, since local and international organizations have been documenting torture and abuse of detainees in Lebanon for years, said [Nadim Houry](#), deputy Middle East and North Africa director. The governments announced investigations are encouraging but the real test will be whether it will enact long-awaited reforms to address the problem beyond the current scandal.

Two videos surfaced on social media over the weekend showing several Internal Security Forces officers beating prisoners following a prison riot at Roumieh in April 2015. The interior minister [confirmed](#) the authenticity of the videos. The ISF and several Lebanese officials, including the Interior Minister Nouhad al-Mashnouq and Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi, denounced the acts and promised to bring those responsible to justice.

Media [reports](#) said that charges were brought against [five security force members](#). However, State Prosecutor Samir Hammoud said that investigations revealed that the crime was motivated by personal reasons and does not, in any way, represent a systematic security practice or policing methodology. The videos caused condemnations nationwide, media [reported](#), galvanizing an atmosphere of discontent as protesters took to the streets demanding Mashnouq's resignation. An October 2014 [report](#) of the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) concluded that torture in Lebanon is a pervasive practice that is routinely used by the armed forces and law enforcement agencies for the purpose of investigation, for securing confessions to be used in criminal proceedings and, in some cases for punishing acts that the victim is believed to have committed.

Lebanon has failed in the past to properly investigate security abuse cases, Human Rights Watch said. No proper investigations were opened into serious allegations of military abuses against detainees in connection with the fighting between the Lebanese army and the armed Fatah al-Islam group in 2007 in the [Nahr al-Bared](#) refugee camp. Nor was there a judicial investigation in October 2012 after army and intelligence officials rounded up and beat at least 72 male migrant workers, mostly Syrians, in the Beirut neighborhood of [Geitawi](#), allegedly because they had received reports of migrants harassing women.

In July 2013, an investigative military judge issued arrest warrants against five members of military intelligence for the [death](#) in custody of Nader Bayoumi, who was detained following clashes in Abra between the army and armed followers of Sheikh Ahmed al-Assir. Despite follow-up inquiries and demands for transparent and public updates from the authorities, there has been no public reporting on the investigations.

The need to combat torture and ill-treatment lie at the heart of several international conventions, treaties, and declarations that Lebanon is obligated to uphold under international law and is bound to by the preamble of its constitution. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

Lebanese authorities should establish a national preventive mechanism (NPM) to visit detention facilities, monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees, and develop a national strategy to prevent ill-treatment, as required by the OPCAT, which Lebanon ratified in

2008. Legislation to create such a body has been [stalled](#) in parliament for several years.

Lebanon should also bring national legislation into compliance with the CAT, especially with regard to criminalizing all forms of torture and ill-treatment, as well as confirming Lebanons obligation to pursue all allegations of such violations in a diligent, timely, and effective manner to bring those responsible to justice.

Judicial authorities should investigate all allegations of torture regardless of the identity of the person accused, including state and non-state actors.

Donor countries providing military assistance to Lebanons security agencies should ensure that aid supports Lebanons compliance with the Convention Against Torture and Lebanons other international human rights obligations, including through support to internal oversight and accountability mechanisms.

Prosecuting those responsible for torture would set a much-needed precedent for the country and send the message that torture will not be tolerated in Lebanon. Ensuring accountability goes far beyond prosecuting those responsible for abusing victims in disgraceful scenes that reach the Lebanese public, Human Rights Watch said.

Not only is justice for the victims at stake, but also the government and security forces reputation, Houry said. Preventing torture strives to strengthen the rule of law and citizens confidence in state institutions.

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