

Physicians for Human Rights

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

<https://phr.org/our-work/resources/unspeakable-acts-torture-in-burmas-prisons/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Dina Fine Maron, M. Francesca Monn on February 7, 2012

This is the third of seven posts from Dina Fine Maron and M. Francesca Monn, writing from Mae Sot, Thailand, a town on the border with Burma. Maron and Monn are PHR interns who are collecting information about medical conditions and human rights abuses inside Burmas prisons. This research is being completed with the help of Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP-B), a Thailand-based advocacy group consisting of former Burmese political prisoners.

Torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person [UN definition of torture](#)

Burmese detainees can be subjected to physical and psychological torture, regardless of age, sex, or the official charges held against them. In some cases, this torture has occurred before official charges have been made, both in secret interrogation centers and in the prisons themselves. In 2005, the AAPP published [The Darkness We See](#), chronicling the grisly torture experiences of around two dozen former political prisoners. The following are excerpts from these testimonies.

Female, arrested 1998: I was with a female warden at this point, and we made a right turn into a room on the ground floor. In this room she opened my shirt and then opened my corset, it had many hooks in the front. Then the female warden patted me down. She told me I could take off the clothes from around my head and only then did I see that I was facing a large window and outside there were maybe seven or eight male wardens watching me. I was totally exposed and they were watching everything.

Every night, eight or ten people came into the room, they were always very drunk. I still hadn't slept but they made me sit on this chair, it was very tall and with very small seat, it had no back to it, and my feet could not touch the ground. It took lots of concentration just to not fall off. They hurled insults at me. They were drunk and screaming at me.

I didn't sleep for three days, I never showered and was having problems keeping food down because of a stomach problem I have. After my interrogation period, I still didn't sleep because I had heard many stories about how female political prisoners were raped, and I was being kept in a men's compound. Female political prisoners were being kept in a cell surrounded by male criminals. I could hear their voices. I was absolutely terrified. After three days I fell asleep in a sitting position.

The psychological impacts of these tactics remain with former political prisoners throughout their lives. As one former political prisoner described after being imprisoned from 1998 to 2002:

When I was finally released, I had become a very different person. I have a fear of large crowds now; I think I am much quieter. I was 23 when I was arrested, I was 27 when I was released, and those four and half years in prison should have been my school years. It was difficult for me to interact with other students and I became withdrawn. Before I was arrested, I spoke English pretty well, but by the time I was released my English was very poor. I had never read an English book in prison. I have problems falling asleep and sometimes there are nightmares. People avoided me when I came out of prison, they did not want to try to connect with me. That was fine because I could not relate to them anymore.

There are countless other stories of the fear tactics, physical defilement, and degradation inflicted upon political prisoners that are documented in AAPP's report.

The international community has praised the new government in Burma for [releasing hundreds](#) of political prisoners. However, hundreds more political dissidents remain behind bars, and the ones who have been released have received no compensation, counseling, or even apology from the government. Documents like [The Darkness We See](#) are important for recording what abuses happened under the old regime, and should play an important role in reconciliation processes.

Enter a valid email address

Invalid email address

Success!

Physicians for Human Rights 2022