

Human Rights Watch

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

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Human Rights Watch Concludes Visit to Prisons, Intelligence Detention Center

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The Jordanian government urgently needs to address the beatings and other serious abuses that are rampant in its prisons, Human Rights Watch said today following a two-week visit to the country.

Human Rights Watch commended the government for opening up its prisons to independent human rights scrutiny, and said that top officials should take immediate steps to prevent and punish the abuses that occur there.

Jordanian jailers routinely subject prisoners to illegal beatings that sometimes turn into torture, said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. Guards hit prisoners with electrical cables and truncheons, and hang them in iron cuffs for hours on end.

Human Rights Watch investigators visited five Jordanian prisons during the last two weeks of August and interviewed more than 100 prisoners in private.

On August 22, the day after Human Rights Watch visited the Swaqa Correction and Rehabilitation Center, 62 miles south of Amman, prison security staff beat all or nearly all of the more than 2,100 prisoners there. They also shaved the beards and heads of all inmates, including religious Muslim men whose beliefs require them to keep a beard. This took place on the first day on the job for the prisons new director, Majid al-Rawashda.

Jailers at Swaqa forcibly shaved religious prisoners to humiliate and degrade them, not for any legitimate penal purpose, Whitson said. This was a blatant violation of the prisoners right to practice their religion.

After learning that the prisoners had been beaten in the wake of their visit, Human Rights Watch returned to Swaqa on August 26. Some 40 prisoners said that security staff beat them on August 22 with electrical cables, wooden sticks and plastic pipes. Prisoners showed Human Rights Watch dark bruises on their backs, upper arms and legs. The prisoners reported that they had heard the cries of other prisoners who were being beaten over a period of at least eight hours, and said that they believed the jailers had beaten all the prisoners. One prisoner, `Ala Abu `Utair, died that night, reportedly as a result of injuries caused by beatings.

A subsequent visit by the National Center for Human Rights, a Jordanian human rights organization, confirmed that large numbers of prisoners were beaten and forcibly shaved on August 22. The Public Security Directorate suspended the new director on August 27.

During Human Rights Watchs return visit to Swaqa on August 26, more than 350 prisoners slashed their bodies with sharp implements as a sign of protest against the recent beatings. At other Jordanian prison facilities, Human Rights Watch researchers had seen a large number of prisoners with multiple long scars on their arms, chests and legs. The prisoners said that self-mutilation was a common reaction to beatings, and to the threat of beatings, because the official complaints process did not function.

The abuses that Human Rights Watch documented were not limited to Swaqa. Prison authorities had carried out beatings in recent months in every prison that the delegation visited, yet disciplinary and legal actions against prison officials have been entirely inadequate.

In other penal facilities, Human Rights Watch spoke to prisoners who said that guards had recently hung them by their arms from iron bars, sometimes suspending them in the air, and beat them for an entire day, a practice that other prisoners said was common. In one prison, a young prisoner missing several front teeth said that guards had recently hit him in the mouth with a steel pipe. In Aqaba prison, in May, a prisoner died from repeated beatings by guards over the course of two days.

In Qafqafa prison, the punishment cells are located in the basement, without natural light, in unsanitary conditions. Prisoners there told Human Rights Watch that the conditions had seriously affected their mental health.

In December 2006, the government took an encouraging step by shutting down the al-Jafr prison, which was one of the countrys most notorious prisons for beatings and other abuse. On this visit, however, the government prevented Human Rights Watch from entering Juwaida prison for men, another facility known for having particularly bad conditions, saying it plans to close the facility soon.

The Public Security Directorate told Human Rights Watch that it is planning a training program for prison directors, who currently receive no specialized training for the difficult job of running prisons and often spend no more than a few months on the job.

Besides visiting correctional facilities, Human Rights Watch together with representatives of two Jordanian human rights groups, Adaleh Center and the Human and Environment Observatory, conducted a series of visits to the Amman detention facility of the General Intelligence Department (GID).

The GID facility held 19 or 20 prisoners during the period that the joint delegation visited it. None of the prisoners the delegation interviewed, all in private, reported beatings or torture, although some prisoners alleged other forms of mistreatment, including threats of violence.

Former GID detainees told Human Rights Watch that they had been subjected to torture in GID custody, including heavy beatings on the soles of their feet carried out in the facilitys basement. Their most recent such allegations involved abuses in April 2006. Former detainees described in detail beatings in the basement, consistent with allegations reported by Human Rights Watch in September 2006 (<https://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/jordan0906>).

Human Rights Watchs research found that GID detainees are often arrested without regard to basic due process rights. All detainees are usually prevented from receiving visits during at least the first week and are held in solitary confinement for the duration of their GID detention. They are sometimes not informed of the crime with which they are charged. They also face extraordinary difficulties in appointing and seeing lawyers, and in challenging their detention. The military prosecutor can order the detention of civilians for up to six months on his own authority, before the State Security Court must issue an order for their further detention.

Another serious problem, evident both at Swaqa and at the GID detention facility, is the long-term detention of security suspects without trial. Three Islamist security prisoners (Samir Hilmi al-Barq, Adnan Sadiq Abu Nujila, and `Isam Tahir al-Barqawi al-`Utaibi, who is known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi) have each been detained for between two- and-a-half and four years, with only a few days outside detention before being re-arrested. The courts have not heard long-pending bail requests presented by the detainees lawyers.

Provincial governors also frequently order administrative detention for persons who are suspected of a crime or have a criminal history. Such detainees often lack the financial resources to hire a lawyer and pay the court fees necessary to challenge their detention. Instead, they resort to hunger strikes to force officials to review their detention.

Three security detainees in Jordan have been locked up for years without charge or trial, said Whitson. The Jordanian courts have failed them.

The five Jordanian correctional facilities that Human Rights Watch visited this month include: Muwaqqar Correction and Rehabilitation Center, Swaqa Correction and Rehabilitation Center, Salt Correction and Rehabilitation Center, Qafqafa Correction and Rehabilitation Center, and Aqaba Correction and Rehabilitation Center. The intelligence detention center is the Detention and Interrogation Center of the General Intelligence Department in Jandawil, Wadi Sir, Amman.

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