

Human Rights Watch

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

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New Accounts of Mistreatment in Crackdown

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(New York) - The Iranian authorities are using prolonged harsh interrogations, beatings, sleep deprivation, and threats of torture to extract false confessions from detainees arrested since the disputed June 12 presidential election, Human Rights Watch said today. The confessions appear designed to support unsubstantiated allegations by senior government officials that Iran's post-election protests, in which at least 20 people were killed, were supported by foreign powers and aimed at overthrowing the government.

"The Iranian government is desperate to justify its vicious attacks on peaceful protesters," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "What better excuse does it need than confessions of foreign plots, beaten out of detainees?"

Human Rights Watch has collected accounts from detainees after their release illustrating how the authorities are mistreating and threatening prisoners in a deliberate effort to obtain false confessions.

A 17-year-old boy who was arrested on June 27 and released on July 1 told Human Rights Watch how his prison interrogator forced him and others to sign a blank statement of confession:

"On the first day, while blindfolded, the interrogator took me to a parking garage. They kept everyone standing for 48 hours with no permission to sleep. On the first night, they tied up our hands and repeatedly beat us and other prisoners with a baton. They kept cursing at the prisoners. The atmosphere was very frightening. Everyone had wet themselves from fear and stress. There were children as young as 15 and men as old as 70; they'd be begging and crying for mercy, but the guards didn't care.

"After two days of interrogation while blindfolded, we were asked about everything: where we had studied, what our parents do, who we voted for, who is educated in the family, if anyone in our family is part of the military. We were forced to give the names of everyone. It was a scary situation because they were threatening us and were very harsh. All we could hear were other people crying and screaming.

"They provided us with a big piece of bread once, but no water. On the last day, they took away the blindfold to force us sign a paper that was blank on top but said at the bottom: I agree with all of the above statements."

Senior Iranian officials have said that detainees have confessed to their involvement in a foreign-backed plot to overthrow the government with a "velvet" revolution. Mojtaba Zolnour, the representative of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the Revolutionary Guard Corps, said on July 2 that all the prominent detainees except one had now confessed. During his July 3 Friday prayer sermon, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, a high-ranking member of the Guardian Council, said that the government would make public some of the confessions obtained from detainees.

State-backed media already have broadcast the confessions of some detainees. Amir Hossein Mahdavi, editor of reformist newspaper *Andishe No*, confessed on Iranian TV on June 27 that reformist groups had laid plans to create unrest before the June 12 elections. Friends of Mahdavi who saw his confession told Human Rights Watch that it was clear from his demeanor that he confessed under duress.

Among the detainees who were recently forced to appear on Iranian television is *Newsweek's* correspondent in Iran, Maziar Bahari. He was detained on June 21 and is believed to be held in Tehran's Evin prison, where Human Rights Watch has [documented cases of torture and detainee abuse](#) in previous years. He has not been allowed to see a lawyer or his elderly mother, with whom he lives. No charges have been filed against Bahari, who holds dual Iranian and Canadian citizenship.

On June 30, the semi-official Fars news agency reported that Bahari had given a press conference where he denounced efforts of

Western media to stage an uprising in Iran similar to the 1989 Czechoslovak "Velvet Revolution," and confessed to a role in covering these "illegal demonstrations." *Newsweek* has strongly defended Bahari's innocence and called for him to be released immediately.

Vajiheh Marsousi, the wife of dissident intellectual Saeed Hajjarian, whom authorities [arrested on June 15](#), believes that he is under intense pressure to sign a false confession. After visiting him in Evin prison, she believes that his life is in danger due to his poor health and lack of medical care in prison.

Information about the abuse of Iranian detainees in custody continues to filter in. An eyewitness who visited the Revolutionary Court on July 1 told Human Rights Watch:

"Hundreds of the prisoners' families were gathered in front of the entrance of the court. On the court's wall, a piece of paper listed the names of 1,349 prisoners. This was a list of people that the court would be soon releasing. There was also a separate sheet with another 223 names. It said that the authorities were still investigating the people on this list and that their families should come back in a couple of weeks. In the few hours that I spent before outside the court, I witnessed a number of people being released. Almost all of them had bruised faces and hands. Some of the families, after seeing their sons/daughters in such bad condition, started to cry, while other families claimed their sons or daughters were missing and their names were not listed."

The authorities have arrested thousands of people in a nationwide crackdown aimed at ending mass street protests that started in Tehran and other cities on June 13 after the official results of the June 12 elections gave incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a landslide victory. Although authorities subsequently released many of those detained, they have continued to make new arrests. Human Rights Watch has collected the names of 450 persons whom security forces have arrested since June 13, including more than a hundred political figures, journalists, human rights defenders, academics, and lawyers.

Most of the best-known detainees have now been held incommunicado for up to three weeks without access to lawyers or family members, raising serious concerns about the probability of mistreatment and pressure to make false confessions.

In the past, the Iranian government has frequently subjected political prisoners to [various forms of pressure](#), including beatings, sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, torture, and threats of torture in an effort to force them to make confessions that they have then publicized in order to criminalize and discredit government critics.

Because of this past record of abuse, relatives, friends, and professional associates of several prominent detainees contacted by Human Rights Watch raised concerns about their probable mistreatment in detention and the likelihood that they would be forced to make false confessions.

International human rights law clearly protects detainees from mistreatment, including forced "confessions." Article 14 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), to which Iran is a party, states that every person charged with a criminal offense has the right "to communicate with counsel of his own choosing," and "not to be compelled to testify against himself or to confess guilt." Principle 21 of the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment states that, "No detained person while being interrogated shall be subject to violence, threats or methods of interrogation which impair his capacity of decision or judgment." A fundamental rule of international human rights law is that all evidence, including confessions, obtained by torture or other ill-treatment must be excluded.

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