

Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/13/dispatches-afghanistan-torture-video-highlights-impunity>

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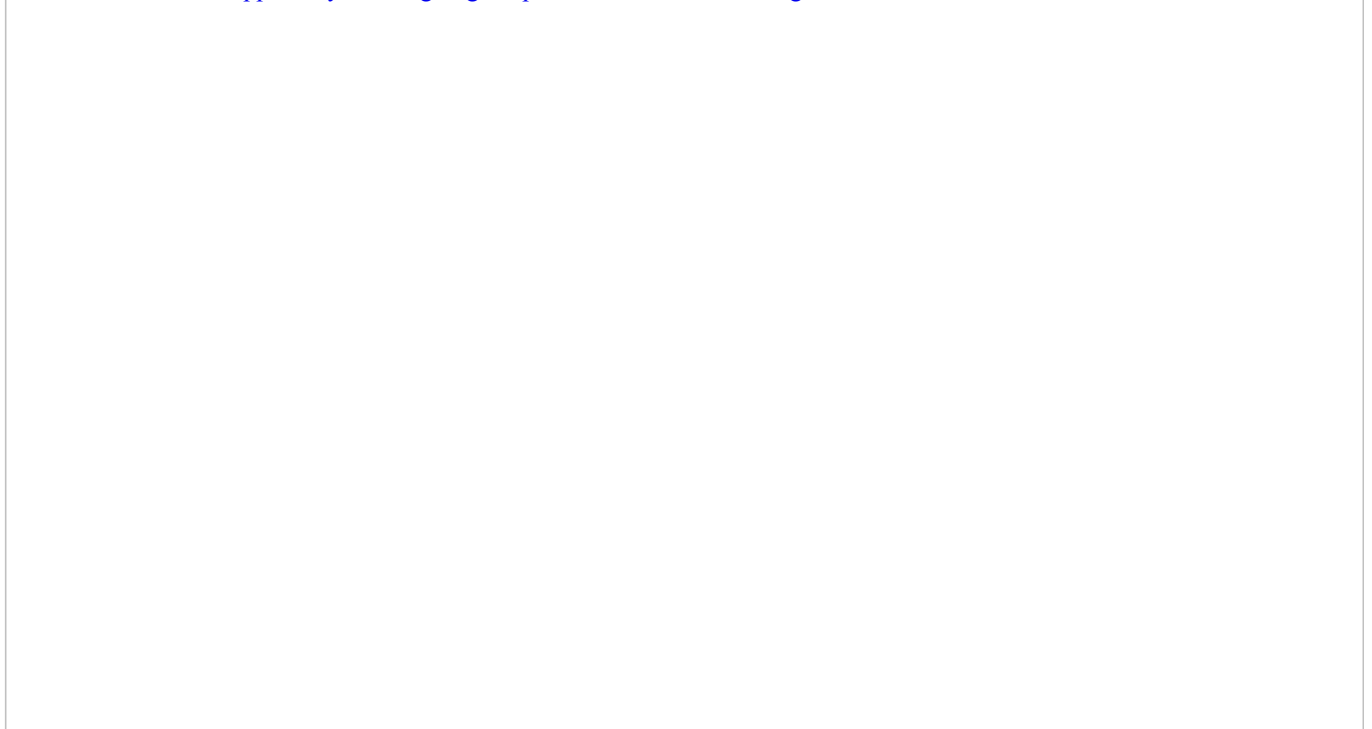
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The Afghan government has struggled to explain an incident of police torture documented in a [video](#) circulated this week on social media.

Screenshot of a video apparently showing Afghan police in Kandahar abusing a detainee.



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Screenshot of a video apparently showing Afghan police in Kandahar abusing a detainee. 2016 unknown

The two-minute video, filmed on a smart phone, shows police dragging a suspect behind a truck, and then beating and biting him. As it [went viral](#) this week, Afghan officials have tried to contain the damage, while [vowing](#) those responsible would be punished.

A Kandahar police spokesman [said](#) that two of its personnel were prosecuted and are currently behind bars for their role in the incident. The Ministry subsequently issued a [statement](#) concurring with that account. No further details have been forthcoming.

Prosecution and imprisonment of Afghan security forces personnel implicated in torture would be a first. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, while there is [increased awareness](#) of human rights standards among Afghan National Police (ANP) and National Directorate of Security (NDS) personnel, there has been no progress on accountability for alleged torture and ill-treatment security forces.

According to one [report](#), Kandahar police involved in the torture appear to be trying to coerce a confession from the suspect, shouting Now do you admit it? as they prepare to drag him behind a police vehicle. In Afghanistan, torture is widely seen as the most effective way to get a confession. Although the Afghan Penal Code criminalizes torture, and prohibits the use of coerced confessions in court, judges almost never reject such evidence. Indeed, the criminal justice system continues to rely [almost entirely](#) on confessions to obtain a conviction.

The fact that the incident took place in Kandahar is no surprise. A [UN report](#) released in February 2015 noted that 58 percent of detainees interviewed in Kandahar had been tortured. Since Gen. Raziq took charge of the Kandahar police in 2011, brutality by police has spiked. Over the past two years, dozens of Kandahari residents have been [tortured](#) to death by the provinces police.

In a January 7, 2015 letter to Human Rights Watch, President Ashraf Ghani [pledged](#) the Afghan government will not tolerate torture. Ghani added that his governments commitment to human rights and rule of law is strong and we are serious in addressing the allegations of torture in our security sector. Although Ghani followed up on that pledge in January 2016 by launching a national action plan to eliminate torture, progress on finalizing both anti-torture policy and legislation has stalled. In the absence of any meaningful deterrent, Afghan security forces continue to engage in the systematic use of [torture](#).

Ghani should launch a thorough probe into the Kandahar torture incident to ensure that those responsible are actually punished. The Kandahar torture video gives Ghani the chance to show whether his stated commitment to ending impunity for torture is government policy or just more rhetoric.

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