

Human Rights Watch

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

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Judiciarys Secret Squads Whitewash Repression, Incriminate Political Detainees

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Secret squads operating under the authority of the Iranian judiciary have used torture to force detained Internet journalists and civil society activists to write self-incriminatory confession letters, Human Rights Watch said today.

Evidence obtained by Human Rights Watch confirms that secret squads of interrogators primarily former intelligence officers purged in the late-1990s by President Mohammed Khatami but now employed by the judiciary forced the detainees to write these confession letters under extreme pressure as a condition for their release on bail. In an attempt to cover up the governments illegal detention and torture of detainees, interrogators have coerced them to write self-incriminatory letters that describe detention conditions as satisfactory and confess that civil society organizations are part of an evil project directed by foreigners and counter-revolutionaries.

The Iranian government shouldnt think for a minute that anyone will believe in the authenticity of these letters. Theyre fooling no one, said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. With stunts like these, Tehran is rapidly losing its already meager credibility on human rights.

Human Rights Watch has documented an extensive pattern of forced confessions by political detainees who have later retracted their statements, which they have attributed to their interrogators. The Iranian government continues to pursue a project to strangle critics and activists, one that Human Rights Watch documented in the report, *Like the Dead in Their Coffins*.

In its latest phase, the government has resorted to forced confessions to pave the way for the prosecution of reformist politicians and leaders of civil society organizations. By obtaining self-incriminating confessions, the government is attempting to destroy individuals reputations, sow discord among activists and ultimately shut down all independent voices and organizations.

Most recently, Human Rights Watch verified independently the contents of a document published anonymously last week by an official working for the Iranian judiciary. In his letter, the official describes the location of secret detention centers and the torture and mistreatment of detainees, including lengthy solitary confinement. The official published this letter in response to the Iranian governments denial of secret detention centers and the mistreatment of detainees.

Human Rights Watch called on the Iranian government to dismantle and prosecute secret squads operating within the judiciary, end arbitrary detentions, release all political prisoners, and comply with its human rights obligations under international treaties.

The judiciary is more worried about protecting its secret squads from later prosecution than ensuring the rights of those detained, said Whitson.

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