

Human Rights Watch

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

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Counterterrorism Case Hinged on Abusive Methods

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A high-profile terrorism case announced by the Egyptian authorities in 2006 was likely based on torture and false confessions, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

The 74-page [report](#) Anatomy of a State Security Case: The Victorious Sect Arrests, examines the case of the so-called Victorious Sect, a group of 22 young Egyptians charged with plotting to carry out violent attacks on tourists and other civilian targets in Cairo.

Human Rights Watch found that the Egyptian authorities had little or no evidence for their striking allegations. Instead, the evidence indicates that Egypt's State Security Investigations (SSI), the country's domestic intelligence agency, subjected the detainees to torture and other serious abuses. And, although government prosecutors in mid-2006 dismissed all charges against the 22 detainees, many remain in custody nearly two years after their arrest.

The Victorious Sect arrests demonstrate how the State Security Investigations uses torture and arbitrary detention to make people confess to crimes real or imagined, said Joanne Mariner, terrorism and counterterrorism director at Human Rights Watch. Despite the SSI's long record of abusive conduct, SSI officers responsible for abuses are rarely held to account.

Human Rights Watch's findings sharply undercut the Egyptian government's official view of the high-profile case.

Human Rights Watch determined that authorities arrested the 22 men in February and March 2006, well before their detention was announced in April. For those first weeks, the men were held in incommunicado detention in various SSI facilities around Cairo, including Lazoghli, the former SSI headquarters. It was during this initial period of detention that the worst mistreatment occurred.

As one of the 22 detainees said: [SSI] transferred us to Lazoghli for a taste of systematic torture . . . we were beaten up with fists and sticks, and kicked around. [SSI] used electricity on different parts of the body, including sensitive areas.

A former detainee of the SSI told Human Rights Watch he heard a number of the men being interrogated at an SSI facility in Giza: What I heard was not just torture; it was beyond imagination, he said. You cannot imagine how harsh it was to hear that, the screaming, how harshly they were tortured . . . I heard some of them screaming when they were being electrocuted. I could hear the electricity too, the zzzzt, zzzzt.

Another former detainee held with members of the alleged group in prison described how the detainees told him of being stripped naked . . . held out in the hallway, completely naked . . . electricity, of course, that's a must, it almost goes without saying. But not just electricity: they said that the officers targeted their most sensitive areas, the genitals. This detainee also said: Some of those guys told me later that they could smell their own skin burning [during the electroshock torture]; they said it was disgusting.

Former detainees of the SSI, who spoke credibly and in compelling detail about the abuses they witnessed against alleged members of the group, suggested that the purpose of the torture was to coerce the men to confess to the plots later announced to the public by the Egyptian authorities. As one told Human Rights Watch: The guys would say they'd be tortured so bad, they'd be screaming, Tell me what you want me to say! Tell us what to say and we'll say it! They'd agree to confirm anything State Security wanted.

Human Rights Watch said that 10 of the 22 men arrested in the Victorious Sect case are still in custody, and that the former detainees who were released are afraid to speak openly, for fear of exposing themselves or their co-defendants to further harassment by the SSI.

Most SSI detainees and their families are understandably terrified of speaking openly about the abuses they've suffered, Mariner said.

Human Rights Watch interviewed former prisoners who had been held for considerable periods with the 22 detainees. It also obtained an account of the detainees experiences from one of the released detainees and from attorneys and family members who saw the detainees during legal proceedings or during visits to prison.

The Egyptian government never responded to Human Rights Watchs repeated requests for information about the case.

Human Rights Watch called on the Egyptian authorities to implement the release orders for the remaining 10 Victorious Sect detainees and carry out a transparent and impartial investigation into the allegations of the detainees torture and arbitrary detention.

The Victorious Sect case illustrates a larger pattern of SSI abuses and raises concerns that abuses are made possible by special powers accorded the SSI under Egypts 1958 Emergency Law. Pursuant to that law, a state of emergency has been in effect continuously since 1981. The state of emergency allows the Interior Ministry to detain and interrogate persons without arrest warrants and to issue detention orders repeatedly for up to six months of detention at a time without a hearing.

Human Rights Watch called on President Hosni Mubarak not to renew Egypts emergency law when it expires in April 2008.

The Egyptian government is currently drafting a new counterterrorism law to replace the emergency law, but many observers are concerned that provisions in the new law will essentially replicate the problematic provisions of the emergency law.

Human Rights Watch further urged Egypt to facilitate real legal reform by allowing a more transparent and deliberative process for considering the proposed counterterrorism legislation.

Repackaging and renaming abusive laws is a cheap trick, not reform, Mariner said. The legitimate need to fight terrorism cannot be used to shield abusive methods from public scrutiny.

Bahrain Death Sentences Follow Torture, Sham Trials

Suspicious Killings and Extrajudicial Executions by Egyptian Security Forces

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