

# Human Rights Watch

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

**<https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/01/20/bahrain-investigate-alleged-torture-activists>**

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Bahrain should investigate allegations that judicial interrogators tortured and in one case sexually assaulted opposition political activists detained after violent protests last month, Human Rights Watch said today. Human Rights Watch also called on the Bahraini government to allow an independent physician to examine detainees who allege abuse and to discipline or prosecute security officials responsible for abusing detainees.

The abuse allegations center on several opposition political activists who were among dozens arrested following confrontations between protesters and security forces in and around the capital Manama in December 2007. The protests, which began on December 17 to mark abuses by security forces during political unrest in the 1990s, grew after the death of one demonstrator following a clash with security forces. In one subsequent incident, according to authorities, protestors set fire to a police vehicle. Several detainees face a range of charges including illegal possession of weapons allegedly stolen from the vehicle.

Bahrain's response to allegations of torture against dissidents will show whether it really respects basic human rights, said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. Bahrain should launch an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into allegations of grave abuses in detention centers.

A senior Interior Ministry official on January 17, 2008, denied there had been any mistreatment of detainees. He was quoted as saying that all those alleging abuse had been examined by a forensic physician and none showed any signs of torture. A lawyer representing several of the detainees told Human Rights Watch he had received no response to his request for a second examination by an outside physician.

Relatives of Maytham Badr al-Shaykh, one of the detainees charged in the protests, told Human Rights Watch during a brief visit to see him at the Adliyah interrogation center in Manama on January 16, he told them that officials had abused him, including by sexual assault and with electricity.

He said, On New Years evening, they celebrated with me. They stripped me and gave me shocks and stuck something wooden up inside me, Al-Shaykhs father, Badr al-Shaykh said. He whispered it to me when the guards allowed me to embrace him.

Maytham al-Shaykhs brother, Hani, told Human Rights Watch that Maytham said his interrogators suspended him by his hands and feet and beat him. He was weeping while we were talking, and he said, They violated my manhood. Both men said Maytham Badr al-Shaykh had bruises they had not seen in an earlier visit and appeared disoriented.

Nader al-Salatna, like Maytham al-Shaykh a member of the opposition Committee of the Unemployed, told Human Rights Watch he had been held in the same facility before his release on January 10. He said he had been blindfolded and beaten during interrogations, and on several occasions had been partially stripped and left outdoors for hours while shackled. At least two detainees in the same facility told him they had been subject to electric shocks during interrogation, he said. Some recently released detainees report being pressured to confess to involvement in theft and possession of weapons in connection with the destruction of the police vehicle.

Unemployment is a major problem in Bahrain and a focus of opposition political organization, particularly among Shia activists who allege the countrys Sunni monarchy systematically discriminates against Bahrain's Shia majority.

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