

Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/02/29/egypt-crackdown-homosexual-conduct-exposes-torture-crisis>

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The Egyptian government continues to arrest and routinely torture men suspected of consensual homosexual conduct, Human Rights Watch said in [a report](#) released today. The detention and torture of hundreds of men reveals the fragility of legal protections for individual privacy and due process for all Egyptians.

The prohibition against torture is absolute and universal, regardless of the victim, said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. Accepting torture of unpopular victims whether for their political opinions or their sexual conduct makes it easier for the government to use this despicable practice on many others.

The 144-page report, [In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct](#), documents the government's increasing repression of men who have sex with men. The trial of 52 men in 2001 for the habitual practice of debauchery, the legal charge used to criminalize homosexual conduct in Egyptian law, was only the most visible point in the ongoing and expanding crackdown.

Today, Egyptian police use wiretaps and a growing web of informers to conduct raids on private homes or seize suspects on the street. Undercover police agents arrange meetings with men through chat rooms and personal advertisements on the Internet and then arrest them.

Police routinely torture men suspected of homosexual conduct. The report cites testimonies of victims telling how they were bound, suspended in painful positions, burned with cigarettes or submerged in ice-cold water, and subjected to electroshock on their limbs and genitals. Numerous testimonies in the report accuse Taha Embaby, head of Cairo's Vice Squad, of direct participation in torture.

Doctors participate in torturing suspected homosexuals, under the guise of collecting forensic evidence to support the charge of habitual debauchery, Human Rights Watch found. Prosecutors refer suspects to the Forensic Medical Authority, an arm of Egypt's Ministry of Justice. Doctors there compel the men to strip and kneel; they massage, dilate and in some cases penetrate the prisoners' anal cavities, subjecting them to intrusive, abusive, and degrading examinations to prove the men have committed homosexual acts.

Human Rights Watch called on the government to reform the criminal justice system to protect all citizens against torture and abuse. It also called on the government to end arrests and prosecutions based on adult, consensual homosexual conduct.

Five Egyptian human rights organizations—the Egyptian Association Against Torture, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, the Nadim Center for the Psychological Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, and the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information—joined Human Rights Watch in Cairo to launch the report. They also joined in releasing the Arabic-language version of Security Forces Abuse of Anti-War Demonstrators, Human Rights Watch's November report on arrests and torture of antiwar demonstrators during March and April 2003.

These reports together document a crisis in Egypt's criminal justice system, said Roth, who presented the report at a press conference in Cairo. Impunity for torture and arbitrary arrest puts all Egyptians' rights at risk.

In its November report, Human Rights Watch documented excessive use of force by security forces to disperse demonstrators protesting the U.S.-led war against Iraq in March and April 2003. After arresting hundreds of protesters, police beat and mistreated many detainees to the point of torture and failed to give medical care to seriously injured persons. Some of those beaten and tortured at the time filed official complaints with Egypt's Prosecutor General, requiring that office to investigate the allegations. Nearly a year after the arrests and complaints, the Prosecutor General has failed to launch an investigation.

Human Rights Watch has documented arbitrary detention and torture in Egypt for more than a decade. In 1992 the organization published *Behind Closed Doors: Torture and Detention in Egypt*, a 219-page report that examined the routine use of torture, particularly

against alleged Islamist activists and sympathizers, by the State Security Investigations Office (SSI) of the Ministry of Interior.

It saddens me that Human Rights Watch has been documenting torture in Egypt for over a decade, said Roth, who also released the 1992 report at a press conference in Cairo. The governments recent initiatives to improve its human rights image mean nothing unless it lives up to its obligation to investigate and punish those responsible for torture.

"In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice In Egypts Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct" is available in English at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/egypt0304/>

To read testimonies from the report, please see: <https://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/02/27/egypt7675.htm>

To read a recent Human Rights Watch briefing paper on police abuse and torture of detainees in Egypt, please see: <https://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/02/26/egypt7660.htm>

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