

# Human Rights Watch

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

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Egyptian-American Held for 4 Months Before Arrest Was Revealed

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(Beirut) [Egyptian](#) authorities forcibly disappeared an Egyptian-American limousine driver, who said authorities also tortured him and held him secretly for four months, Human Rights Watch said today. The man, Khaled Hassan, 41, provided detailed allegations of torture, including two allegations of rape, to Human Rights Watch.

National Security agents arrested and disappeared Hassan on January 8, 2018, in Alexandria, Egypt. Despite immediate requests from his family to the authorities for information on his whereabouts, his arrest was not publicly acknowledged until he appeared before a military prosecutor for the first time on May 3. Egyptian authorities, in a letter on October 2 [responding to Human Rights Watch inquiries](#), claimed that he was only arrested on May 3 and denied that he had been tortured. But independent forensic experts who reviewed footage of Hassans leg wounds found them consistent with his account of torture.

Egyptian prosecutors should immediately open an investigation into his torture claims and have him examined by a forensic medical specialist, Human Rights Watch said. A civilian judge should review his detention and release him unless there is a credible evidence of a recognizable crime.

Hassans disappearance and detailed allegations of torture and the governments denials reinforce the reality that Egyptian security forces operate with impunity, said [Michael Page](#), deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. Khaled Hassan has been able to bring the gruesome details of his treatment to light, but thousands of others held in Egypts prisons have not been able to tell their stories.

Mohamed Soltan, a former prisoner in Egypt and a human rights advocate of the independent group [Freedom Initiative](#) in the United States, alerted Human Rights Watch to the case in September. In interviews conducted remotely, Hassan told Human Rights Watch that in the weeks following his detention on January 8, security forces severely beat him, gave him electric shocks, including on his genitals, and anally raped him in at least two incidents, once with a wooden stick and once by another man.

Human Rights Watch was able to interview two members of Hassans family and to review their communications to the authorities seeking information about his whereabouts. Forensic experts also reviewed photos of his wounds taken by Hassan recently in prison. Family members said that Egyptian officials had ordered Hassans wife and children to leave the country and offered them no legal recourse. They are now in the US.

Hassan said military prosecutors who saw him for the first time on May 3 ignored his account of torture and ordered him detained pending investigations. They accused him, along with hundreds of other defendants, of involvement in a case related to an ISIS-affiliated group in Egypt. Hassan denied those accusations. He has been in pretrial detention in Istiqbal Tora Prison in Cairo since then, where he said he has had insufficient food and health care. He has not been brought before a civilian court or allowed to know the official charges against him, and no date has been set for his trial.

Hassan, who had immigrated to the US years earlier, was living in New York City and spent weeks every year with his wife and children, who lived in Egypt, a family member said. He was never stopped or questioned before, the relative said.

Human Rights Watch has documented [a pattern of systematic torture](#) of detainees in secret National Security Agency detention centers and police stations to collect information about suspected dissidents and prepare often fabricated cases against them. Torture techniques usually included [stress positions, electric shocks, and threats of rape and sometimes rape](#).

Local rights organizations have documented [hundreds of disappearances in the past five years](#). Although Egypts National Security Agency is responsible for the most flagrant abuses against prisoners, no agency officer has been convicted of these crimes in a final court

verdict in Egypt's recent history.

The Convention Against Torture defines torture as the deliberate infliction of severe physical or mental pain or suffering, by a public official or equivalent, for a specific purpose such as punishment. An enforced disappearance occurs when someone is deprived of their liberty by state agents or people acting with the state's authorization, support, or acquiescence, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person.

Enforced disappearances and torture are absolutely prohibited under international law in all circumstances. They violate a range of human rights obligations and those responsible can in certain circumstances be prosecuted in other countries.

The use of military courts to try civilians violates Egypt's obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, which guarantees the right to fair trial. Governments should never use military trials for civilians when normal courts can still function.

Despite an intensifying crackdown on human rights by the Egyptian authorities, President Donald Trump's administration restored US\$195 million in military aid to Egypt in July.

Hassan said that US embassy officials have visited him, but he expressed frustration that the US administration has had little to say about the abuses in Egypt under the rule of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Human Rights Watch has said previously that, given authorities' continued apparent systematic use of torture, Egypt's allies should stop all security assistance and training and condition their military and security aid on concrete improvement of human rights and accountability of torturers.

The continuous recklessness of Egyptian authorities in crushing the rule of law should be of serious concern to Egypt's allies, Page added. US authorities should raise Hassan's case with the Egyptian authorities and should make it clear that torture and abuse are no way to ensure Egypt's security.

### **Arrest, Torture, and Rape**

Hassan said that men in civilian clothes, who introduced themselves as belonging to the Interior Ministry's National Security Agency, arrested him in Alexandria as he went to meet his brother in the afternoon of January 8. They took him to the agency's office in al-Mamoura area, then transferred him to the agency headquarters in Smouha, Alexandria.

There, he said, security agents severely physically abused him for eight days, then moved him to their headquarters in Abbassiya, Cairo, where they held him for another month or more. After forcing him to confess crimes under torture, they sent him back to Smouha for three more months until most of his visible wounds had healed, and then they finally presented him to military prosecutors on May 3, who registered that date as his arrest date and ordered him detained without investigating his account of torture.

In incommunicado detention, he said, National Security Agents severely beat him, cutting his chin and bloodying his nose. They usually stripped him naked during the abuse. They hung him from his arms for days, dislocating both his shoulders. They repeatedly gave him electric shocks to the head, tongue, the anus, the testicles, and his groin area. In Smouha, they used wires and in Abbassiya, they mostly used electric shock devices, which he sometimes saw being charged. Sometimes, he said, they placed him on a wet sheet to increase the effect of electric shocks.

He said that agents used a taser on his leg, causing an open wound that became infected. His leg became swollen and inflamed and the pain and infection made him faint repeatedly. They operated on the wound without anesthesia and while an officer was standing over his chest, he said.

He said that the agents raped him on one occasion with a wooden stick. On another occasion, Hassan said, after he insulted an officer who threatened to arrest his wife, the officer ordered another man to rape Hassan anally. When they did this, I was ready to say [give any confessions] what they wanted, he said.

The worst part was electrocution, he said, breaking into tears. At the end of each session, they would have to carry him back to his detention cell because he could not walk, he said. He added the agents tried to fix his most visible injuries on his body before sending him to military prosecutors on May 3.

While in Abbassiya, Hassan said, he was placed in a very narrow cell with 15 other detainees, where they had to sleep on top of one another. He said he was allowed to use the toilet once or twice a day and to shower once a month. Authorities told him that he was a spy.

Human Rights Watch reviewed recent photos and a video of what Hassan said were marks of wounds on both of his legs caused by electric shocks. Several experts from the Independent Forensic Expert Group, facilitated by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, reviewed these materials and found that the lesions are consistent with and in one instance, highly consistent with application of an electric shock device, such as a taser-like instrument used in stun or angled-stun mode, in the manner that Hassan described.

### **Government Response**

Human Rights Watch sent a letter to the Egyptian authorities explaining the initial findings of Hassan's case on September 23, followed by another letter with more details and corrections on September 25. In its written response to Human Rights Watch, the State Information Service, a government body that oversees foreign correspondents, denied that Hassan had been forcibly disappeared or tortured. It also said his lawyers had not filed an official request for him to be examined by forensic doctors.

But Hassan said he told military prosecutors, who saw him on May 3, that he had been forcibly disappeared and tortured since January and that they did not order an investigation of his torture claims. He said that he and his lawyers did not file an official request for an

examination because fellow detainees told him it would not lead to anything and might actually prolong his stay in incommunicado detention. They [security agents] know what they are doing, Hassan said.

One of Hassans brothers said that the family filed a police report about Hassans disappearance the day after his disappearance. Human Rights Watch reviewed copies of the complaints the family sent to the prosecutors in Alexandria on February 15, to which the authorities did not respond. The State Information Service response, the first official response in years to a Human Rights Watch inquiry, did not clarify why the authorities failed to respond to the familys complaints.

Military prosecutors included Hassan in military prosecution case 137 of 2018, known as the Sinai Province Case II, in which hundreds of defendants are accused of joining the Egyptian ISIS-affiliate and aiding its goals through spying on the army and plotting violent attacks.

Hassan denied any involvement with the group and said he knows only one person accused in this case who was also severely abused and needed surgery afterward. Hassans lawyers were unable to obtain a copy of the prosecution file. In recent years, prosecutors in Egypt have sent large numbers of political dissidents for prolonged pretrial detention. In the vast majority of cases of political dissent, whether violent or peaceful, lawyers are usually not allowed to obtain a copy of the prosecution file until the trial begins and so are unable to review the evidence or challenge it. The State Information Service confirmed that Hassan was accused in that case but did not cite any specific charges.

### **Familys Deportation**

One of Hassans brothers said that several days following his disappearance, on January 19, men in civilian clothes broke into Hassans home in Alexandria, where his Peruvian wife and his three Egyptian-American children lived.

The men broke down the door and violently searched the house, saying they were looking for weapons, said Hassans wife, Liuba Skateeff, and another brother, who was there. The men refused to show any judicial orders or prosecutors permission for the house search. They destroyed the apartments library and told Skateeff, who had been living in Egypt for over 11 years, that she had to leave the country immediately. Officers stayed in her apartment for four hours and left police informants in front of her building, she said.

Frightened, she and the couples three children, ages 4 to 10, left for the US less than a week after arranging for the ticket money, she said. The officer had threatened to arrest her, she added.

Human Rights Watch reviewed copies of her passport that showed travel dates and stamps and her residence permit in Egypt, which is valid until June 2020. When she tried to return to Egypt in June to visit Hassan in jail, Egyptian airport officers denied her entry, detained her and her 4-year-old child for two days in the airport, and then ordered her deported to the US where she has a green card. The State Information Service acknowledged in its response that Skateeff was deported and said in its response to Human Rights Watch that she could have legally challenged her deportation. But Skateeff said that the airport officers who detained her offered her no explanation and no legal recourse for an appeal. They also seized her phone and refused to allow her to contact the Peruvian embassy, she said.

She also said that the couples two young daughters have had panic attacks since the raid, when armed men pointed guns at the childrens heads.

### **Prison Conditions**

The family managed to first see Hassan in prison on May 9. When he saw us he collapsed, one brother said. He cried like a baby He showed us signs of torture and electrocution.

Hassan said that US embassy officials have visited him in prison three or four times since May, but that prison authorities seized books that the embassy officials sent him. Hassan also said he had been seeing a psychiatrist before his detention, but that prison officials would not let him obtain his prescribed medicines. Human Rights Watch obtained copies of labels for prescription medicines that he had been taking. Prison authorities have not offered him any proper psychiatric consultation and did not allow him to see an outside doctor, he said.

It was a miracle to bring a pillow to sleep on, Hassan said.

Human Rights Watch has previously [documented Egyptian prison authorities systematic mistreatment of prisoners](#), including lack of food and opportunity for exercise and denying prisoners hygiene products, mattresses, and beds.

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