

Human Rights Watch

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

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Detained, Beaten, Abused on Suspicion of Being Gay

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(Beirut) A 31-year-old Syrian refugee in Lebanon was allegedly detained and tortured in February 2016, apparently on suspicion of being gay, Human Rights Watch said today. The man, identified only as Shadi for his protection, told Human Rights Watch that he had been detained by Lebanese Military Intelligence officers, and [tortured](#) over a five-day period at Military Intelligence, Ministry of Defense, Military Police, and Internal Security Forces centers.

[Lebanese police stand guard as protesters carry banners during a sit-in for LGBT rights in Beirut.](#)

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Lebanese police stand guard as protesters carry banners during a sit-in for LGBT rights in Beirut. 2009 AP Photo / Hussein Malla

Human Rights Watch interviewed Shadi in Beirut in March, but, upon his request, waited to publish his story until he was safely resettled to [Europe](#). On November 2 and 3, Human Rights Watch sent letters to the Ministries of Defense and Interior, Military Intelligence, Military Police, and Internal Security Forces, detailing the torture allegations and calling for a full investigation. The Interior Ministry responded on December 13, saying that it had a complaints procedure but would not be able to pursue an investigation and penalize offending officers unless the victim filed a complaint in person.

Torture is common in Lebanon's detention centers, but vulnerable people like Shadi, a gay Syrian refugee, are at particular risk, said [Lama Fakih](#), deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. The routine abuse of detainees isn't going to stop until Lebanon puts an end to the culture of impunity surrounding its security forces.

Lebanon has failed in the past to properly investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment by security services. [Lebanese](#) authorities should immediately investigate the allegations of torture in this case and hold everyone responsible to account.

Shadi said that all interrogations at security branches focused on trying to elicit a confession that he was having sex with men or to punish him for being gay. He said he was not allowed to contact his friends or a lawyer during his detention, and that he was never informed of the charges against him or brought before a judge.

Shadi said that in January, armed Military Intelligence officers raided an apartment he shared with several other Syrian [refugees](#) in Jounieh, interrogated him and his roommates, punched them in the face, and hit them with batons. After seeing a picture of Shadi and a transgender woman hanging on his wall, the officers questioned him about his sexuality. Military Intelligence officers returned in February and arrested Shadi. Every time I asked why I was being arrested the officers just hit me and didn't answer my questions, he said.

Shadi said he was transferred to the Sarba military intelligence branch in Jounieh, where officers blindfolded him, stripped him naked, and tortured him throughout a two-hour interrogation. He said the interrogator beat him with sticks and punched him in the face once. The next morning officers blindfolded Shadi and forced him to sign a paper he could not read. Shadi said he asked what he was signing, but was only hit again. The officers then transferred him to the Defense Ministry in Yarze.

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Lama Fakih

Deputy Middle East Director at Human Rights Watch

There, he said, officers took him underground to an interrogation room and questioned him for more than four hours about his sexuality. Shadi said the interrogator elbowed him in the stomach, on his neck, and kicked him in the groin in an attempt to elicit a confession that he was having sex with his male roommates. He recalled the interrogator saying, You gays are coming here and making our country dirty. Neither our society nor God accepts this!

Shadi said that security officers then transported him to Rehanieh military police prison, where officers took him into a room and told him to undress. He said he was handcuffed naked and told to bend over facing the wall. I will insert this into your anus to determine how many times you've had sex, Shadi said an officer told him. He inserted the rod, causing Shadi to scream out in pain and beg the officer to stop. [Forced anal examinations](#) lack evidentiary value and are a form of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment that may in some cases amount to torture.

Shadi said that he asked to call a friend or a lawyer, but was refused. He slept in a cell, handcuffed to a wall. The next morning, he said military police officers took him downstairs into an interrogation room, with a number of officers slapping and cursing at him along the way. Shadi was then transferred to Jounieh police station.

There, Shadi said, officers slapped him several times in the face and punched him in the stomach. They interrogated him the next morning. He quoted one officer as saying, We don't know how to get rid of you Syrian refugees and now you bring us gay Syrians? One officer kicked Shadi in the chest, causing him to fall backward with his feet in the air.

An officer then beat Shadi on the soles of his feet with a stick. Human rights organizations have documented the use of *Falaqa*, or beating the victim with sticks, batons, or whips on the soles of the feet, as a torture method in Lebanon. Several hours later Shadi was transferred to Beirut's Hobeish police station, where he was not ill-treated, and eventually released.

Human Rights Watch has corroborated Shadi's story with an international and a local organization providing him with assistance. Human Rights Watch also reviewed a medical report prepared by a local doctor shortly after Shadi's release, documenting fluid in Shadi's ear and swelling and bruises all over his body due to beatings.

Homosexuality is not expressly outlawed in Lebanon. Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code states that any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature is punishable by up to one year in prison. This provision has been used to prosecute people suspected of homosexuality even though the law does not define the phrase contrary to the order of nature, leaving it to the interpretation of individual judges.

Shadi said he is concerned that others may experience similar treatment in Lebanon. It's true that I suffered under torture but I was lucky that international and local organizations intervened to help, he said. I'm worried that others may not be as lucky as me. What if another Syrian refugee is arrested and tortured but no one knows about his case to help?

Human Rights Watch has long documented torture by Lebanon's security services, and the failure of authorities to properly investigate allegations of abuse. In a 2013 report, Human Rights Watch documented the [widespread use of torture](#) by the Lebanese Internal Security Forces against vulnerable groups like drug users, sex workers, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. In July 2013, Human Rights Watch documented [seven cases of torture of detainees](#) in military custody, including two children, following clashes between followers of Sheikh Ahmed al-Assir and the Lebanese army.

The UN Committee against Torture found in its 2014 [report of an inquiry in Lebanon](#) that torture in Lebanon is a pervasive practice that is routinely used by the armed forces and law enforcement agencies for the purpose of investigation, for securing confessions to be used in criminal proceedings and, in some cases for punishing acts that the victim is believed to have committed.

The need to combat torture and ill-treatment lie at the heart of several international conventions, treaties, and declarations that Lebanon is obligated to uphold under international law and is bound to by the preamble of its constitution. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and its optional protocol.

Lebanon's parliament on October 19 took [a positive step](#) to try to end the use of torture with a new law to establish a National Human Rights Institute (NHRI), which will include a Committee for the Protection from Torture, known as a national preventative mechanism. The committee will have the authority to conduct regular unannounced visits to all detention sites, investigate the use of torture, and issue recommendations to improve the treatment of detainees.

Lebanese authorities should fund and staff the NHRI with qualified, independent experts and ensure that it is able to visit all detention sites in the manner and with the frequency it wishes without fear of sanction or reprisal. Lebanon should also bring national legislation into compliance with the Convention against Torture, including criminalizing all forms of torture and ill-treatment and confirming its obligation to pursue all torture allegations in a diligent, timely, and effective way to bring those responsible to justice.

Donor countries providing assistance to Lebanon's security agencies should ensure that aid supports Lebanon's compliance with the Convention against Torture, including by providing support for internal oversight and accountability mechanisms, and refrain from funding units that are credibly found to abuse human rights.

Shadis case is unfortunately far from an isolated incident, Fakhri said. It's long past time for authorities to enact long-awaited reforms and systematically stamp out the use of torture in Lebanon.

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