

Human Rights Watch

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

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Anti-war Activists Held Illegally Without Charge

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Seven students, journalists and activists detained more than ten days ago in connection with antiwar protests have been subjected to torture and beatings at the Cairo headquarters of Egypt's State Security Investigations (SSI), Human Rights Watch charged today. Five remain in custody but have not been brought before judicial authorities or allowed to see lawyers or family, in violation of Egyptian and international law.

An eighth activist, Ashraf Ibrahim, a member of the Popular Committee in Support of the Palestinian Intifada, has been missing since Saturday, April 19. Several days earlier, SSI officers raided his home in his absence and confiscated his computer, video camera and other documents.

The SSI has a pretty bad record for mistreating political prisoners, but these reports of torture are especially disturbing, said Joe Stork, Washington director of the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch. The government should investigate and punish those responsible without delay.

Stork also called on the authorities to release immediately those still in custody.

Egyptian security forces apprehended students Amr Muhammad Abd al-Atif, Mahmoud Hassan Hassan, and Walid Abd al-Razaq Fuad at midday on Saturday, April 12, as they were about to attend a demonstration at the Press Syndicate in Cairo. That night, the authorities picked up student Ramiz Gihad from a caf in the Bab al-Luq neighborhood. On Sunday, April 13, journalist Wael Tawfiq disappeared and was later seen in custody at SSI headquarters. Ibrahim al-Sahari, a journalist for the Egyptian daily Al-' Alam al-Yom, and activist Marwan Hamdi were taken from their homes in the early hours of April 14 and taken to an unknown location.

Two of the students, Amr Abd al-Atif and Walid Fuad, were released on April 15. One told Human Rights Watch that he and the others held at SSI headquarters had been beaten at the time of arrest and during interrogation sessions. Describing his beating during interrogation, he said, One of them was holding my arm behind my back so I couldn't protect myself. One hit me in the groin and testicles, one hit me in the stomach, one on my chest, and one around the thighs. The Cairo-based Nadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence examined this student and confirmed testicular congestion, contusions and bruises in the back muscles and the muscles on the front of the left thigh.

This student also described how Cairo University law student Ramiz Gihad, age 25, was taken out of their cell several times a day:

"He stayed a long time upstairs, up to four hours at a time. He was tortured by electricity as well as beatings. He told us he didn't even have to tell us, though, you could tell by his condition. We saw the burn marks from the electrocution. He was nearly comatose when they carried him in [the cell]. His face was extremely swollen and bruised. He was shaking. There were burn marks on his hand and elbows, and the feet and toes. He had dry mouth and the police carrying him in ordered us not to give him any water."

Four of those still in custody are believed to still be held in SSI headquarters, and al-Sahari is believed to be in Mazra' Tora prison. The authorities have not charged them with any offense or issued administrative detention orders, in violation of Egyptian law and international standards, and have not permitted lawyers or family members to visit or speak with them.

Al-Sahari had been detained without charge for several weeks and beaten in February 2003. His wife, Hala Dahrough, told Human Rights Watch that during the most recent arrest, SSI officers complained that al-Sahari has a long tongue and talks too much about [President Hosni] Mubarak, and that they thought he would have learned a lesson from his February detention.

In late March, the Egyptian authorities arrested an estimated 800 persons in connection with antiwar demonstrations that also included

slogans criticizing Egyptian government policies and President Mubarak. Human Rights Watch interviewed numerous persons detained at that time who also said they had been beaten while being apprehended and in police custody.

President Mubarak and other high Egyptian officials constantly proclaim that Egypt is a democracy and committed to the rule of law, Stork said. But what we see instead is an epidemic of state security violence and arbitrary detention in response to people protesting officials and their policies.

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