

Human Rights Watch

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

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Guinean police and other government security forces routinely torture, assault, rob and sometimes even murder the citizens they are entrusted to protect, said Human Rights Watch in a report released today.

The 30-page report, [The Perverse Side of Things: Torture, Inadequate Detention Conditions and Excessive Use of Force by Guinean Security Forces](#), documents how police brutally torture men and boys held in police custody. The victims are individuals suspected of common crimes as well as those perceived to be government opponents. Once transferred from police custody to prison, many are left to languish for years awaiting trial in cramped, dimly lit cells where they face hunger, disease and sometimes death.

These abuses are occurring in Guinea during a time of uncertainty tied to economic turmoil and impending political transition. Guinea's economy is in a tailspin; its president, Lansana Conté, is rumored to be gravely ill; and its military is believed to be deeply divided.

The Guinean government is allowing its security forces to get away with torture and brutality, said Peter Takirambudde, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. Combating this brutality by ending impunity could boost Guinea's stability in this uncertain time.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 35 individuals, including numerous children, who provided detailed and consistent accounts of mistreatment and torture by police officers while in police custody. Victims told Human Rights Watch that, during police interrogation, they were bound with cords, beaten, burned with cigarettes and corrosive chemicals, and cut with razor blades until they agreed to confess to the crime of which they were accused.

The police tied my arms behind my back and then hoisted me up in a tree in the courtyard, said a 16-year-old boy detained in Guinea's largest prison. Two policemen were telling me to tell the truth, to admit that I stole the goods. Then they pushed their cigarettes into my arms. At first I maintained my innocence, but I was in so much pain that I had to say I stole it.

Human Rights Watch also interviewed 20 detainees who have spent more than four years in prison awaiting trial. Many of these individuals said that they are in prison based in part on a confession they made under torture.

The right to be tried within a reasonable time is fundamental, and is guaranteed under both international and Guinean law, said Takirambudde. The Guinean government must hold court sessions more often to ensure that individuals are not left to languish in prison for years without trial.

The report also examines a pattern of excessive use of force by Guinean security forces during demonstrations to protest worsening economic conditions due in part to rampant inflation. The most recent incident occurred in June 2006, when the government responded to demonstrations against the rising prices of basic commodities with a brutal crackdown.

In interviews with Human Rights Watch, numerous victims and witnesses to abuses that occurred during the June strike described involvement of the police and gendarmes in murder, rape, assault and theft. Eyewitnesses to 13 killings told Human Rights Watch that security forces fired directly into crowds of unarmed demonstrators. Scores of Guineans, many of them mere bystanders to the demonstrations, were severely beaten and robbed at gunpoint by security forces.

Guinea has an entrenched culture of police brutality, said Takirambudde. The government's failure to tackle impunity emboldens abusive officials and fuels further abuse.

The Guinean government has legal obligations under several international and African human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the U.N. Convention Against Torture, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights as

well as under Guinea's own constitution. These obligations require the government to respect the right to life and freedoms of expression and assembly, and prohibit the use of torture. Police and other security forces have routinely violated those obligations.

Human Rights Watch called on the Guinean government to immediately investigate and bring to justice those responsible for crimes committed by state security forces during the June 2006 nationwide strike, as well as those responsible for torture and ill-treatment of individuals in police custody.

Human Rights Watch also recommended that international donors such as France, the United States and the European Union call publicly and privately on the Guinean government to investigate and, where applicable, punish those responsible for the abuses. International donors should also support efforts by local nongovernmental organizations to increase their ability to monitor and document violations by security forces.

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