

Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/16/rwanda-needs-take-torture-seriously>

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On December 6, the UN Committee Against Torture released its [concluding observations](#) after a routine review of the situation in [Rwanda](#). During the review, committee members raised concerns about serious violations including torture, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and intimidation of journalists, human rights defenders and opposition party members and asked numerous, precise questions about the Rwandan governments actions.

The Rwandan governments response was to deny, deny, deny. On illegal detention and abuse in military camps, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the government wrote in its final submission to the committee that, we want to repeat and insist that there are no unofficial or secret places of detention in Rwanda.

In October, Human Rights Watch issued a [report](#) documenting abuses in military camps around Kigali, the capital, and in the northwest. For at least the last seven years, Rwandas military has frequently detained and tortured people, beating them, asphyxiating them, using electric shocks and staging mock executions. Most of the detainees were disappeared and held incommunicado, meaning they had no contact with family, friends, or legal counsel. Many were held for months on end in deplorable conditions. We continue to receive information about new abuses.

Many of those tortured were forced to confess to crimes against state security and later transferred to official detention centers. Instead of keeping quiet, scores of victims dared to speak up at their trials. When the committee asked the Rwandan government why judges did not investigate when defendants said in the courtroom that they had been tortured which the government is required to do under the Convention against Torture the government simply presented a table in its report asserting that no one alleged they were tortured in trials from 2013 to 2017.

This stands in stark contrast to the facts. From 2011 to 2016, we documented [65 cases](#) in which individuals said in court said they were illegally held in military camps or unlawful safe houses. Of those cases, 36 said they were either tortured, beaten or otherwise forced to confess to crimes they did not commit. These were statements either made publicly in court during trials we monitored or are reflected in official court judgments.

In response to allegations, including by Human Rights Watch, about torture in Kami, a military base outside Kigali, the government wrote in its final report that it needed, clarifications of these allegations because the people who alleges [sic] to have been tortured in The Kami Military Camp are unknown. Those reports did not provide names of victims and suspects; therefore, no investigations were conducted. To Johnston Busingye, the justice minister who headed the Rwandan delegation at the committee, I say: please see Appendix I, pages 92-98 of our last report.

We provided the case numbers and the identity of those who dared to speak up in court. It is not difficult to confirm. That the government would simply say these people never spoke is the final act of torture. It denies them their right to tell the truth about what happened.

The government maintains it has no political prisoners. The government also says any case of enforced disappearance is investigated. Here again, recent facts tell a different story. Take the case of [Thophile Ntirutwa](#), Kigali representative of the Forces démocratiques unifiées (FDU)-Inkingi, a banned opposition party. Ntirutwa was forcibly disappeared on September 6, after the arrest of several other FDU members the same day, and held incommunicado until September 23. During this period, the police would not confirm to Human Rights Watch or his family whether he was in custody.

He has now been charged with supporting an armed group. On November 21, during a hearing, Ntirutwa said in court, I was disappeared for 17 days. My family was not informed of where I was, nor were human rights organizations. My wife told the police I had been

disappeared. All that time I was blindfolded and handcuffed before it was revealed I was at [a] police station.

These were words said in a public courtroom. The government should follow through on its obligations, open an investigation, and hold those responsible for this enforced disappearance accountable. But if recent history is any indication, chances are nothing will happen. Ntirutwa had previously been detained on September 18, 2016, allegedly by the military, in Nyarutarama, a Kigali suburb. He said he was beaten and questioned about his membership in the FDU-Inkingi, then released two days later. Accounts of this detention were published, but the government did not investigate.

The committee wrote its final report that it is seriously concerned both about Rwandas failure to investigate allegations of torture and its failure to clarify whether or not it opened an investigation into the allegations of unlawful and incommunicado detention.

The committees concluding observations are cause for concern about the situation in Rwanda. While technically Rwanda has made advances in its legislation, in reality it does not seem to take seriously the absolute prohibition on torture. Rwanda is bound by both national law and international treaty obligations to act on allegations of torture and enforced disappearances, and to take steps to prevent such abuses. Instead of denying these abuses exist, it should demonstrate that it is ready to meet those obligations.

Unlawful Detention and Abuse in Unauthorized Places of Detention in Uganda

Torture and Unlawful Military Detention in Rwanda

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