

## **Police Admit Torture**

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Use of brutality to coerce confessions is justifiable in the war on serious crime, officers claim.

Iraqi police are using torture and other forms of coercion to extract confessions from suspects, apparently frustrated by a system that quickly returns criminals to the streets.

Taxi driver Mahmoud al-Hilfi, 33, claims he was arrested on January 3 in the al-Shaab district of Baghdad because he was carrying a Kalashnikov assault rifle in his car.

Although police ordinarily just confiscate illegal weapons, Hilfi says he was accused of looting and of transporting the rifle in order to sell it.

He alleges that the police used torture in a bid to extract a confession.

"They questioned me by spraying water on my head, and connecting me via electrical wires to a hand generator," he said. "At first I thought it was a field phone, and they were ringing another line."

He says he was then beaten on various parts of his body, and told he must confess to a list of crimes that the police had drawn up.

But Hilfi says, "they got nothing, because there was nothing against us", and he was released after two weeks of detention.

Although the bruises have healed, his left leg still trembles so badly that he cannot use his vehicle's clutch.

"I will have to exchange my car for an automatic to earn enough money for my family," he said.

Lawyer Abd al-Kareem al-Sadee, a former policeman in the crime department in al-Karkha, told IWPR that torture does occur, but insisted that there are "few cases of torture and violence relative to the number of policemen".

He blamed the use of torture on the police's inability to gather evidence against "specialised professional criminals."

"I suggest that police officers should be trained abroad to develop their efficiency in dealing with criminals and with all types of crimes," he said. "Some officers were sent on courses abroad, but to Arab countries like Egypt, which does not serve the development of democracy."

One taxi driver, who refused to give his name, said he was held 48 days in al-Ameriya police station in December and January after another suspect accused him of car theft.

He told IWPR that he suffered regular beatings, and saw other suspects tortured in front of him – including the stepson of an alleged murderer, who he said was sodomised with rubber truncheons.

The driver told IWPR about another case involved an Egyptian accused of drug trafficking. According to the driver, the man's wife was held in the station with her infant son for more than a month. The police slapped her around in front of the suspect in order to extract a confession from him

The wife, later released, confirmed the report to IWPR, but refused to give her name.

The torture, the driver says, took place after the US military police charged with overseeing police operations left the police station.

"The Americans were in the station from 7 am until sunset. After around 10 pm, all of this began," he said.

Colonel Dia Hussein, the deputy head of a major crimes department, admitted that detainees were sometimes abused to extract information.

He said police took the Egyptian suspect's wife into custody because they believed that she was involved in his gang, and that she had asked to take her infant with her.

But after denying that torture was rampant, Col. Hussein then suggested that it was sometimes acceptable practice.

"We never subject anyone to torture, except at certain stages of the investigation under certain circumstances," he said. He did not detail the circumstances under which physical coercion was required.

By way of justification, Col. Hussein said that the police are up against hardened criminals who are taking advantage of Iraq's current state of disorder to commit offences.

"Seventy-five percent of all crimes are committed by people who have a criminal record and were released by [Saddam Hussein's] general amnesty in 2002," he said. "Many of them are getting arrested again. They think this is a golden opportunity [for crime] because no one can catch them and hold them to account."

According to Col. Hussein, "many of them have been arrested by the Americans and then released for lack of evidence."

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