

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 51/112/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 198
4 August 2005

Embargo Date: 4 August 2005 00:01 GMT

USA/ Jordan/ Yemen: Secret detention centres

"I couldn't bear it any longer... even if I were an animal I wouldn't put up with it."
Salah Nasser Salim 'Ali speaking about his secret detention by US authorities.

Two men in a Yemeni prison have told Amnesty International how they were held in US secret detention in solitary confinement for over one and a half years without seeing daylight, mostly shackled and in handcuffs, with no chance of communicating with their families, lawyers or humanitarian organizations. They had no idea in what country they were in.

Salah Nasser Salim 'Ali and Muhammad Faraj Ahmed Bashmilah, two Yemeni friends who were living in Indonesia, told Amnesty International that they were separately detained, Salah in Indonesia in August 2003, Muhammad in Jordan in October 2003. Salah was flown to Jordan. In a report published today, both men say they were tortured by the Jordanian intelligence services for four days, and then flown to unknown underground jails where they were held in solitary confinement without charge by US guards for over 18 months. In May 2005 they were finally transferred to Yemen, only to be imprisoned there by the Yemeni authorities.

"We fear that what we have heard from these two men is just one small part of the much broader picture of US secret detentions around the world," said Sharon Critoph, North America researcher at Amnesty International, who interviewed the men in prison in Yemen. "The US authorities must disclose the identities of all people who are being held in secret, where they're being held, and open these places up to international scrutiny."

"The USA and other countries must end the practice of secret detention. Not only do such conditions encourage torture and ill-treatment, but to be "disappeared" from the face of the earth without knowing why or for how long is a crime under international law and is an experience no-one should have to go through," said Sharon Critoph. "States that co-operate in committing such human rights abuses -- as Jordan, Indonesia, and Yemen appear to have done -- are equally at fault."

Salah Nasser Salim 'Ali has a daughter he has never seen, who was born nearly two years ago while he was being detained. His wife says she has been traumatised by what happened and is struggling to bring up her daughter alone.

Throughout their experiences, neither friend knew the other was detained. Both men described

their first secret detentions as being in an old-style underground facility with high walls. It took 3.5 - 4.5 hours to fly there from Jordan. After 6-8 months they were transferred to a modern purpose-built prison run by US officials, a three-hour plane journey away. Again, they had no idea where it was. Both men thought it was underground because they had to go down stairs to enter and up to leave. In both places, Western music was piped into the cells 24 hours a day.

The men's account of the modern prison suggests the use of psychological techniques to obtain information. They were interrogated every day by US personnel. Muhammad Faraj Ahmed Bashmilah described the guards and interrogators as being fully covered "like Ninjas".

"It is the final injustice that both Muhammad and Salah find themselves imprisoned yet again, this time by the Yemeni authorities -- who themselves admit they have no reason for holding them except that their transfer from US detention was conditional on doing so," said Sharon Critoph. "The Yemeni authorities should release these men from detention immediately if they are not to be charged with a recognisable criminal offence and given a fair trial."

"The Jordanian authorities should investigate the allegations of torture against Muhammad Faraj Ahmed Bashmilah and Salah Nasser Salim 'Ali and ensure anyone responsible is brought to justice," said Sharon Critoph.

To see the report, *USA/Jordan/ Yemen: Torture and secret detention: Testimony of the 'disappeared' in the 'war on terror'*, please go to: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr511082005>.

Amnesty International is campaigning to stop torture and ill-treatment in the "war on terror". For more information, please go to the campaign home page: <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/stoptorture-index-eng>.

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