

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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United Arab Emirates (UAE): Member of ruling family implicated in "torture" video

Amnesty International has expressed grave concern to the UAE authorities about their apparent failure to date to investigate a serious criminal assault alleged to have been committed by a member of the ruling family in Abu Dhabi on a man with whom he had a business dispute. Evidence of the assault, which is believed to have been committed in 2004, has recently circulated in the form of six minutes of video footage in which Sheikh 'Issa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a brother of the UAE president, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, can be seen beating a defenceless man with a board from which a nail is protruding, setting light to his pubic hair, choking him with sand and driving a motor vehicle over him apparently breaking his limbs. Two other people can be seen assisting in the assault, including a uniformed police officer. The footage is said to be part of a longer sequence of a film of the same assault and one of a number of films of criminal assaults carried out by Sheikh 'Issa bin Zayed Al Nahyan on a range of individuals in Abu Dhabi.

According to reports, the UAE authorities have long been aware of the evidence of assault but have failed to bring criminal charges arising from the assault. A UAE Ministry of Interior statement given to the US media organization ABC claims that the matter was "settled privately" between the Sheikh and the man he assaulted, said to be an Afghan national named Mohammad Shah Poor, and that neither man wished to bring charges against the other. The statement contends that "all rules, policies and procedures were followed correctly by the Police Department" but fails to provide any details of the official investigation or to explain why the authorities did not consider it a criminal offence, prompting concern that the Sheikh was not held to account because of his position and influence as a member of Abu Dhabi's ruling family.

In its letter to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Amnesty International urged that a thorough, independent investigation be established immediately and called on the government to clarify publicly what steps, if any, it has taken to investigate this and other allegations of criminal assaults by Sheikh 'Issa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as well as the involvement and complicity of members of the UAE police and possibly other officials in either assisting such criminal acts or in helping cover them up to assist the perpetrators to escape justice. Amnesty International said that even if the victim of the assault had agreed to settle the matter "privately", as the Interior Ministry statement contends, this did not absolve the UAE authorities of their responsibility to investigate what appears clearly to have been a serious criminal assault and to hold the perpetrators to account under the law of the UAE.

Responding to the publicity arising from the release of the film footage and international expressions of concern, the UAE authorities announced that they would open an investigation, stating on 29 April that the government of Abu Dhabi "unequivocally condemns the actions depicted on the video" and that "the events depicted on the video appear to represent a violation of human rights" which should be "fully reviewed in their own right." It remains unclear, however, whether Sheikh 'Issa bin Zayed Al Nahyan or others have been arrested or are facing charges in connection with the filmed assault on Mohammad Shah Poor. His present whereabouts are unknown.

Public Document

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