

**Lebanon: Culture of acquiescence
perpetuates torture and ill-treatment of women detainees**

Amnesty International called on the Lebanese authorities to take immediate steps to protect women against torture, ill-treatment and other gender-based violations in custody.

In a report published today - -Lebanon - Torture and ill-treatment of women in pre-trial detention: a culture of acquiescence- - the organization paints a disheartening picture of widespread violations against women accused of political or major criminal offences and women migrant workers. Women in pre-trial detention in Lebanon are routinely denied the protection of the law and held for long periods incommunicado. Many have been coerced to confess guilt or testify against themselves.

“A culture of acquiescence neutralizes the legal system,” said Amnesty International. “The prosecutor’s office fails to oversee the conditions in police stations where police, who are invariably male, have been shown to extort confessions. The examining magistrate hears allegations of torture but takes no action against the torturers.”

The report stresses that the safeguards contained in the Lebanese Constitution and the law against incommunicado detention, torture and ill-treatment are insufficient and are also frequently breached in practice, in a culture of acquiescence tacitly accepted by the police, prosecutors, judges and the authorities at large.

Even when police heads, prosecutors or judges oppose violations, they fail to take sufficient action to end the impunity of those who commit them.

Heba Ma'sarani was arrested in Tripoli in 1997 accused of the murder of her husband (who may have committed suicide). She was apparently transferred from the Port Police Station by the head of the station when he heard officers prepared to rape her; however in Tripoli's Bab al-Ramla Police Station she was reportedly tortured, including by suspension and beating, for seven days without interrogation, and raped at night while the police station head was absent. The examining magistrate ordered her transfer to prison. Amnesty International delegates visited this rape victim in September 2000 in Tripoli prison hospital where she was guarded by a large male security officer who watched her continuously. She is said to now weigh 36 kilograms; her own trial is still continuing but no steps have apparently been taken to investigate her allegations of rape.

"I have nothing left to live for," she told Amnesty International delegates. "I only hope that the publication of my experiences may help to prevent others from suffering as I have."

Huyam 'Ali 'Alyan, aged 29, a political detainee charged in March 2001 with collaborating with Israel, was subjected to physical and psychological torture at the hands of the military security service, including severe beating on sensitive parts of the body, threats and the use of sexually abusive language. The Military Prosecutor referred her to a forensic doctor whose report showed bruises consistent with the use of violence.

In addition to the abuses against women accused of major criminal offences and those accused of political offences, mainly collaboration with Israel, the report focuses on a third category: the systematic ill-treatment, or even torture, of a large number of the dozens of thousands of foreign women domestic workers in Lebanon. Amnesty International points out that these violations are perpetrated by both the

employers and agents of the state which these women approach to complain about their ill-treatment at the hands of their employers or employment agencies. This may include beatings, locking up, deprivation of food, verbal abuse and overwork. Many are also subjected to gender-based violations, including sexual abuse.

In 1997 Clarissa Colliante and Elda Esquillo, both Filipino migrant workers, were arbitrarily detained and held incommunicado without charge or access to lawyers after they refused orders of the Director of the General Security to return to their employers, who, they said, ill-treated them and refused to terminate their contracts. Clarissa was later deported to the Philippines and Elda Esquillo was forced to return to her employer. In 1999 Clarissa Colliante won a suit against her employer in court in the Philippines.

Amnesty International's recommendations to the Lebanese authorities include calls for reform of the law to ensure protection of women migrant workers; independent investigations into all allegations of torture and ill-treatment against women and into gender-based violations such as rape; giving the victims adequate medical treatment and appropriate reparation; bringing the perpetrators to justice; improving the conditions in women's prisons and providing gender-sensitive training to staff in law enforcement institutions.

"It is now time for the Lebanese authorities to end the culture of acquiescence which allows these violations to continue with impunity," Amnesty International concluded.

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