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Lebanon: excessive force and torture by security forces must be investigated

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Amnesty International is concerned about the continued ill-treatment of 23 Islamist activists allegedly involved in clashes with the Lebanese security forces in the Dhinnayah plateau in February 2000. The men have been held in detention since early 2000, and were reportedly tortured while held *incommunicado*.

"I was tortured using suspension by the Ballanco and would remain suspended for about an hour and a half. While I was held in that position I was beaten by sticks and cable in my feet under the supervision of a colonel. I remained without food for 24 hours, physically and mentally exhausted. I was deprived of sleep and cut off from the outside world held blindfolded in a dark room. It was like a grave. Interrogation continued throughout seven days only to be interrupted by beating every ten minutes," said one of the detainees interviewed by Amnesty International.

"These allegations warrant independent, thorough and impartial investigation. We are troubled by the Lebanese authorities' routine dismissal of torture and ill-treatment made consistently by political detainees including those held in connection with the Dhinniyyah events," Amnesty International said.

According to testimonies obtained by Amnesty International the Dhinniyyah detainees were reportedly subjected to various techniques of torture and ill-treatment while held *incommunicado* for weeks following their arrest. They were subjected to torture by electric shocks and to verbal abuse, denigration of their religious beliefs, deprivation from prayers, threats of sexual abuse of their female relatives. Even after the examining magistrate had finished interrogating them, detainees said they remained blindfolded with their hands cuffed and tied behind their backs. Torture mostly took place at the Ministry of Defence Detention Centre at al-Yarze.

As a protest against their ill-treatment and in order to press for release pending trial, 17 of the detainees decided to boycott a hearing of their case before the Justice Council on 17 January 2003. The security forces responded with what appears to be excessive use of force -- batons and tear gas in closed areas -- to end the detainees' boycott of the hearing. According to a statement issued by the Department of Internal Security seven detainees and five members of the security forces were injured as a result. The statement said that the detainees used sharp instruments of 'their own manufacture' against the officers, but this claim was dismissed by a lawyer of the detainees.

Following the incident, the Dhinniyyah detainees were reportedly beaten up and moved to solitary confinement. According to a statement issued by the relatives of the detainees, after being moved to solitary confinement the prisoners were denied food for two days while held in cells without access to natural light. The statement also said that security officers shaved off the beards of the detainees, contrary to their beliefs, and 'desecrated' Islamic literature belonging to them as punishment.

Two of the detainees, Ihab al-Banna and Sa'id Minawi were admitted to Dhahr al-Bashiq Hospital, reportedly having sustained serious injuries. They have since been held without access to their families and lawyers and no information about their state of health has been released.

"Allegations of torture and ill-treatment have been prevalent in this case from the very start," Amnesty International said today.

In a statement published by the Lebanese media on 31 December 2002, Public Prosecutor Judge Adnan Addoum, summarily dismissed as 'baseless and fabricated allegations' Amnesty International's concerns and reports of torture and ill-treatment of victims. Referring to the Dhinnyyah detainees' case he stated 'allegations that the detainees were subjected to ill-treatment while being interrogated by the military police have no basis in truth'.

The authorities must also investigate cases where detainees have allegedly been coerced to make statements incriminating them under torture or duress. As a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment the Lebanese authorities must, pursuant to article 15 'ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made'.

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