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EVIDENCE OF TORTURE IN IRAN

INTRODUCTION

The following extracts are from testimonies given by former Iranian prisoners to representatives of Amnesty International in Europe. Their names and other details which could identify them have been changed by Amnesty International in order to protect their identity, and that of their families still living in Iran, who might otherwise suffer reprisals.

The following testimonies refer to experiences of torture and imprisonment dating from August 1981 to early 1984 and are representative of many others collected by Amnesty International during the same period. Although Amnesty International is not in a position to vouch for the details of each of these testimonies, the high degree of consistency and the detail of evidence produced leads Amnesty International to conclude that they reveal a pattern of torture of political detainees. Some of those who gave testimonies were accused of being supporters of various illegal political organisations opposed to the Iranian regime, such as the People's Mojahedine Organisation of Iran, the People's Fedayeen Organisation or the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran. Others were critical of certain policies of the Iranian Government but were not members of any political organisation.

Some of those interviewed by Amnesty International have also been examined by Amnesty International medical doctors, who have concluded from detailed examination of these individuals that the signs and symptoms were consistent with both the kind of torture alleged by the people concerned and the date of such torture as reflected in the testimonies.

The method of physical torture most commonly reported by former prisoners in Iran is beating, sometimes applied indiscriminately to all parts of the body, frequently concentrating on the soles of the feet, the back or the genitals, for prolonged periods of time. The prisoner is usually blindfolded, with hands and sometimes ankles bound. The beating is administered with whips or cables of varying thicknesses. Former prisoners have consistently reported that they were beaten until they lost consciousness, and many have described how, after prolonged beating on the feet, the feet were so swollen and painful that they were unable to stand or walk, and were forced instead to crawl along the floor.

Former prisoners have consistently reported having been subjected to "football", often shortly after arrest, when the prisoner, blindfolded and with his hands bound together, is pushed from one guard to another while being beaten, punched and kicked. As one former prisoner stated in his testimony, reproduced below, this form of torture affects the prisoner not only physically but psychologically, in that he feels isolated, insecure and disorientated. Other torture methods commonly reported to Amnesty International include suspension from the ceiling by the hands or feet for prolonged periods of time, and various forms of sexual abuse.

Physical torture is frequently accompanied by or alternated with forms of psychological torture. This may consist of insults to the prisoner and/or his family, threats of execution, and sometimes mock execution as described in the fourth testimony below. Some former prisoners have reported being told by guards that relatives, friends or colleagues had been executed or were in prison, had become insane or were gravely ill, and found out on their release that this was untrue. One former prisoner, when interviewed by Amnesty International, described how he had spoken from a prison telephone to his brother and sister, who begged him to tell the guards everything he knew, as they were to be arrested by Revolutionary Guards at their home unless he confessed. Other former prisoners testified that they were forced to watch groups of prisoners being executed, or to collect the bodies afterwards and load them onto lorries to be taken away for burial.

On 8 February 1978 Iran made a unilateral declaration against torture, thereby reasserting its support for the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Being Subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1975. The use of torture is expressly forbidden in Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran ratified on 24 June 1975. Although these initiatives took place before the February 1979 revolution, Iran has taken no steps to revoke them, and is therefore still considered to be bound by these international human rights instruments. In addition, Article 38 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, promulgated on 15 November 1979, states:

"Any form of torture for the purpose of extracting confessions or gaining information is forbidden. It is not permissible to compel individuals to give testimony, make confessions or swear oaths, and any testimony, confession or oath obtained in this fashion is worthless and invalid. Punishments for the infringement of these principles will be determined by law."

Amnesty International is concerned that the torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in Iran will continue unless decisive measures are adopted by the appropriate Iranian authorities to safeguard prisoners from such treatment. Amnesty International believes that such measures should include:

- a clear public condemnation of the use of torture by the highest authorities in Iran,
- a limit to incommunicado detention, and prompt and regular visits from relatives, a medical doctor and a lawyer of the prisoner's own choosing.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concern regarding allegations of torture of detainees in Iran and recommended that an independent investigation be initiated into such allegations. In this respect Amnesty International also calls on the Iranian authorities to pay due attention to compensating the victims, and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

1. The following extract is taken from a testimony given by a former teacher:

"I was arrested in September 1983, when four armed Revolutionary Guards came to my home. They searched it thoroughly, and took away five or six books. Then they told my mother and brother that I was being taken for investigation and would afterwards return home.

I was taken blindfolded to a Revolutionary Guards building located in a deserted backstreet. They put me in a room on my own, where I was handcuffed to a water-pipe, and remained there, still blindfolded, until the following morning. I was told I could remove the blindfold, but that whenever a guard was about to enter the room I had to replace it. I didn't know the reason for my arrest and asked one of the guards. He said he didn't know, but that there must have been a good reason.

Nothing happened for three or four days, and then someone came to interrogate me; I was blindfolded and handcuffed at the time. He asked me a lot of questions, but didn't give me time to answer, he just kept slapping my face. Then he left me, saying that I had one day in which to write down everything about my political organisation and the people connected with it.

I was not a member of any organisation, but wrote some things down about my past. When the interrogator came again, he said this was rubbish and punched me in the face and on my chest and back. He repeated that I should write down details of the organisation to which I belonged, and again punched and kicked me.

Later I was put in a room with no windows, with five or six others. We were told not to communicate with each other, but remained without blindfolds except when a guard came in.

One of them was badly wounded: he had lost a hand and was vomiting constantly. After three days he was given some pills, but they didn't help, and the following day they had to take him to the hospital. He returned later, but was still vomiting, and after two days he was taken away again. We didn't see him again. After a while the guards allowed two or three of us to speak, but we were told to talk about ordinary things only. Three or four days later I was taken again for interrogation. The interrogator told me I hadn't come to my senses, and told me again to write down my confession. He rarely asked me questions, and if he did he didn't allow me any time to give an answer. He just told me to write down my problems, and afterwards I would be questioned about them.

At about 6 pm one day in November, a guard took me to a different room for interrogation. They put a sack over my head and over that a

piece of cloth around my mouth, so that I couldn't shout out. There were three or four people there. First of all they punched me hard and repeatedly in the face. I found out later that I had bruises around my eyes, my lip was split open and I lost a filling from a tooth. Then they removed my shirt and told me to lie face down on a bench. I heard the crack of a whip and I felt as though my back was being cut by a huge knife. They gave me six lashes and then they asked me questions about my political organisation. The pain was so bad that, had I been able to, I would have committed suicide. I was punched and kicked and thrown by different people against the wall. One of them jumped on my chest. This same treatment, beating and kicks, the five or six lashes, and questions, was repeated over and over for about two hours. They didn't believe me when I said I didn't belong to any organisation.

When I returned to the room where the others were, I was given some soothing powder for my back and a Novalgene injection. Some of the others were taken away for blood transfusions.

The beatings usually took place at about 11 am, 6 pm or after midnight - before meals, so that the prisoners wouldn't vomit. The beatings continued for about ten days. We spent all the time lying down on our stomachs, we even had to eat in that position, because of the pain.

They continued to order me to write down my problems. One day the interrogator said that unless I wrote down all my problems within 24 hours I would be responsible for what followed. He punched me twice in the back and kicked me as I was taken out. Two nights later the interrogator said "You're a Marxist, and if you don't write anything down this time, we'll execute you." I knew that this needn't be just an empty threat, and for the next three days I was so nervous I couldn't eat.

After three days I woke to find one of my testicles badly swollen, and complained to the guard. He dismissed my complaint, but after five days I was taken to the hospital and given antibiotics, then I returned. The antibiotics should have been given to me within a five-day period, but were spread over 15 days, and had no effect.

Eventually I was tried, (by this time I had written sixty pages of "confessions" and "problems") but I had no lawyer. In the courtroom were a judge, a guard holding a machine gun and two others. The judge accused me of participating in meetings of the People's Mojahedine Organisation and the People's Fedayeen Organisation, and of supporting both organisations, of writing letters and spreading political ideals, and applying to foreign embassies for visas. I was not informed about the verdict or the sentence, but my family later told me I received a suspended sentence of five years' imprisonment.

I was released in January 1984."

In May 1984 this prisoner was examined by an Amnesty International medical doctor, who stated in the resulting medical report:

"I was able to count eighteen distinct marks on his back consistent with whipping. These marks ran in several directions and appear to have been made with one type of 'whip' which produced lesions like tramlines with parallel outer pigmented tracks 3-5 mm. across with a central pale channel. The lesions were up to 30 cm. in length.

.... the whip lesions were impalpable and clearly of several months age. Three small lesions were present on the left side of the chest ... these could well have been caused by the tip of whatever whip was used. There were very small scars on each leg, probably caused by kicks."

2. The following testimony was given by a supporter of the People's Mojahedine Organisation who was arrested in northern Iran in September 1981:

"I was searched and blindfolded and put in a cell with my hands tied behind me. I was beaten with cables from midday to the evening, while they interrogated me. One of the first things they did was to play "football" with me: still blindfolded, with my hands bound, I was pushed and beaten, punched and kicked from one guard to the next, who insulted me at the same time. This "football" game is often used on people who have just been arrested. It breaks down the resistance, and can make one feel lonely and unstable. I received the same treatment, and the interrogation continued, for four days, and the next morning I was taken from my cell, blindfolded and with my hands still tied. They wrapped a blanket round me and tied it in place with ropes and covered me with a sack. I was put into the back of a van to be transferred back to my home town. During the journey two guards beat me, and taunted me by asking why I didn't try to escape, and threatened me with execution. We arrived at midday and they left me in the courtyard in the hot sun. Later they fetched me and removed the blanket, and the beatings began again.

After I'd gone to the Prosecutor's office, they put metal handcuffs on my hands: the kind which have serrated edges, and which tighten their grip if you move. I remained handcuffed for more than one month - the only time they were removed was after 10 days, when my hands were bound in front instead of behind my back. I had to eat my food while wearing them, which was very demoralizing, and also while going to the toilet or performing ablutions. During torture sessions the handcuffs would tighten, and the wounds on my wrists became infected.

My new cell was completely waterlogged as rain drained from the roof of the building into the cell. There was only one chair and I spent all my time sitting on that chair. I couldn't lie down to sleep on the floor because of the water, and my movements were very restricted because of the handcuffs. The interrogations continued, and they told me to repent and to confess on television. The beating was different this time. Before it had been fairly haphazard, intended to frighten or disorientate, and was applied to all parts of my body, but now it was much more systematic. They find out your weak spot and then concentrate on that: for example, they stripped me and laughed to see how I reacted to that kind of humiliating treatment. They beat me repeatedly on the soles of my feet with a thick electric cable, and from time to time they would pour cold water on my feet and then start all over again. They continued for hours. The beating was the most painful thing, the hardest to bear, and I often lost consciousness. The next day two guards held my hands and two others my feet. They raised me up and then dropped me on the floor. One of them jumped onto my stomach, and I felt something snap in my back. Then I fainted. During that month, apart from the beating, I was burned with lighted cigarettes, and my fingers were crushed together after a pencil was inserted between them. I was also suspended by my wrists from the ceiling for ten hours, and subjected to a mock execution.

After one month I had lost a lot of weight, I was in a lot of pain and very weak. I had to crawl along, as I couldn't walk. I saw a doctor, who said I should be hospitalized but instead I was transferred to the main prison and the handcuffs were removed at last. The physical torture stopped, but the taunts and insults continued, and loudspeakers in the prison broadcast speeches by the mullahs all day. I was sentenced to death, but eventually managed to escape from the prison. Afterwards I learned that both my parents had been arrested and three people who were in the same prison were executed after my escape."

More than two years after he was subjected to torture and ill-treatment, scars on this prisoner's wrists, apparently left by the handcuffs, are still in evidence and he also complains of spinal problems which have reportedly been diagnosed as partial muscular paralysis.

3. The following description of torture and imprisonment was given to an Amnesty International representative by a Kurdish office worker:

He was arrested at his office in October 1983 by uniformed Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) who took him away by car. They told him they wanted to ask him some questions and were "inviting"

him for a few days. He was taken to prison at Pasdaran headquarters by a unit of Pasdaran who had surrounded the building. He was blindfolded. In the evening he was given some blank paper in order to write down all he knew about the Democratic Party of Kurdistan. He refused to write without having been asked specific questions.

In the evening, after three hours, the torture began. It continued for eleven days. The first day, one group beat him on the feet with a telephone cable 1 cm. in diameter. This went on for five hours, with interruptions for verbal threats; he was also kicked and punched. The session ended at 10 pm.

On the second day, the torture began again. In a dark room in the basement, he was made to lie face down on a bed, to which he was bound by handcuffs attached to the legs of the bed. His head was wrapped in some kind of covering to stifle his cries. He was stabbed with long needles. They injured his bare feet by trampling on them wearing shoes. He was then forced to walk in the prison courtyard.

The physical torture was accompanied by moral torture: threats to prevent him from sleeping; being falsely informed that his brother and sister were in the cells next to his.

After seven days the torture was intensified:

- They tied his arms and legs to the four corners of an iron bedstead, then placed a block of cement on his back (he was tied face down and they continued to beat him). The block of cement measured about 0.20 m. by 0.40 m. and was about 0.20 m. thick; it weighed approximately 20 kilos. His nose was injured. He once remained like this for twelve consecutive hours and at other times for six, eight or ten hours.

He was almost paralysed and had to be carried. When he went to the toilet there was blood in his urine. Bones were displaced in his hands and feet.

After the period of torture, he remained in isolation, incommunicado, for eighty-three days. A doctor from the prison dispensary saw him after three days to remove the clotted blood which was forming haematomas; this doctor was in fact only a student. He was given four doses of antibiotics per day. At the beginning his dressings were changed every three or four days, then the visits to the dispensary stopped and the dressings were changed every two or three weeks.

Paralysis in his hands persisted. A doctor from the town came on the eighty-third day: he was examined blindfolded. An X-ray was prescribed. The hospital was in the town. He was taken there blindfolded but managed to escape. He was never able to see his torturers.

In June 1984 this prisoner was examined by an Amnesty International medical doctor.

In his report, the doctor describes scars, particularly on the feet and ankles, which could result from blows with sticks or cables or from being tightly bound for prolonged periods of time. He concludes that these scars are consistent with the allegations of torture made by the prisoner.

4. The following extract is taken from the testimony of a young man living in central Iran:

"I was arrested in August 1981, while driving in town. I was blindfolded and taken to the local komiteh building, (equivalent to a local police station), and put in a cell with three others.

The window was covered up and when I tried to look outside the door, a guard told me that if I wished to leave I should name my political contacts. I was treated better than the others initially: I was given a good meal and generally treated well, but the interrogator told me to tell everything I knew. When I was on my way to the toilet I saw a man coming towards me with very swollen feet. I was shocked and didn't understand. I asked him what had happened, but a guard interrupted and hit me hard in the face. I was blindfolded and pushed into a room with four or five guards who played "football" with me for ten to twenty minutes, during which time I was severely beaten, particularly in the genitals. Afterwards I was put in a cell on my own. I was in great pain, particularly in one testicle.

Later that same night I was transferred with others to another prison in a nearby town. My head was shaved and I was blindfolded. There I was put in a cell with four guards who alternately beat me, again concentrating on my genitals, and abused me sexually. Later I was told I could speak to relatives on the telephone, who told me that they were being arrested and that they would be sent to prison unless I gave the names of other so-called political contacts. The line was then cut.

The following day the sexual abuse and beating was repeated, after I refused to give information. I remained in the same prison for fifteen days, during which guards threatened me with execution, and to tell my family that I was in possession of heroin or weapons. I was also subjected to prolonged whippings until I fainted. I was twice subjected to mock execution. One evening I was taken by car to an unknown place. I was blindfolded and my hands were tied behind

my back. I was told that I was to be executed, unless I named my friends, in which case I would be released. The guards discussed how to execute me, and asked me whether I would prefer to be executed quickly or slowly. I said "quickly" but the guards then disagreed, saying that they preferred to kill me slowly, in stages. Then they discussed whether to kill me there or return me to the prison to be hanged, and whether or not I should remain blindfolded. Finally, they fired shots around me. I was deeply shocked and confused, but then realized that I had not been hit but had been the victim of a mock execution. This was repeated the following evening, but in the meantime I was treated in a friendly way, given a good meal and coaxed to give information.

Later I was transferred back to the prison where I was initially held and kept in solitary confinement. I was repeatedly beaten with cables of different thicknesses, particularly on my genitals. This resulted initially in my losing consciousness, and afterwards I was unable to urinate for 24 hours. The next day, still blindfolded, I asked the guard for permission to go to the toilet, and he told me to take three paces forward and one to the right. Following these instructions, I fell from a height of four to five metres, while the guards laughed. I broke two teeth and badly damaged my knee.

I was again transferred and held in solitary confinement at the prefecture in the same town. I had so far spent two and a half months in detention and had no bath or medical treatment, and received no visits from relatives during this time. Then another prisoner was put in the cell with me. This man had been badly beaten, was disorientated, confused and incontinent. His clothes were badly soiled with his own urine and excrement. We remained together for several days, and I was then given permission to take a shower and to wash the other prisoner at the same time. On returning to the cell I saw a young Kurdish woman whose feet were grey and swollen. She was being carried by a guard who was telling her that her feet would be amputated.

I received a visit from relatives only after four months in detention, and was tried (my trial lasted only five minutes) after seven months. I was accused of giving assistance to others who had taken up arms against the Islamic Republic. The religious judge spoke of my date of arrest as being one and a half months after the actual date, but when I tried to protest the judge ordered that I be taken out. I was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, but was released after fifteen months."

In May 1984, eighteen months after his release from prison, this former prisoner was interviewed and examined by an Amnesty International medical doctor. He complained of the following ailments, which he felt to be related to his experiences of imprisonment and torture: pain in the genitals, particularly in the testicles (the right testicle is situated in the abdomen as a result of the beatings sustained); spinal pain in the region of cervical vertebrae and lumbar vertebrae; headaches in the occipital and frontal regions; disturbed sleep with frequent nightmares; loss of ability to concentrate, with intrusive flashbacks of his prison experiences; constrictive anxiety-related chest pains.