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## Iranian Acknowledges Torture of Some Protesters

By [ROBERT F. WORTH](#) and NAZILA FATHI

BEIRUT, Lebanon — A top judiciary official acknowledged Saturday that some detainees arrested after post-election protests had been tortured in Iranian prisons, the first such acknowledgment by a senior Iranian official.

Meanwhile, a second day of hearings was held in a mass trial of reformers and election protesters, with more than 100 people accused of trying to topple the government. The accused included a French researcher and employees of the French and British Embassies, prompting angry responses from Britain, France and the [European Union](#).

But even as the trial appeared to further the campaign by the hard-line establishment to intimidate and silence the opposition, at the expense of alienating Iranian moderates and the West, the statement on torture by the judiciary official, [Iran's](#) prosecutor general, revealed continued divisions within the government.

Speaking to reporters at a news conference, Qorbanali Dori-Najafabadi, the prosecutor general, said "mistakes" had led to a few "painful accidents which cannot be defended, and those who were involved should be punished."

Such mistakes, he said, included "the Kahrizak incident," a reference to the deaths of several detainees at Kahrizak detention center in southwestern Tehran.

His comments came after weeks of reports that detainees had been tortured, and they fell somewhere between an admission and an accusation, as most of the arrests were made by the [Revolutionary Guards](#) and the paramilitary [Basij](#) militia, groups that are not under the control of the judiciary.

Even so, the statement was likely to be incendiary in Iran, where allegations of torture by Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi became a central justification of the 1979 revolution that brought the hard-line clerics to power.

Detainees' accusations of torture have already prompted a parliamentary investigation of abuses at Kahrizak, which was closed last month by order of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah [Ali Khamenei](#).

Mr. Dori-Najafabadi said his team had tried to change the situation after taking control of the arrests last month, the ILNA news agency reported, and he encouraged people to come forward with complaints.

"Maybe there were cases of torture in the early days after the election," he was quoted as saying, "but we are willing to follow up any complaints or irregularities that have taken place."

In another indication of dissension, he said a special judiciary committee had recommended the release of Saeed Hajjarian, a prominent reformist. Mr. Hajjarian's family said he had been tortured, and has expressed concern about his health. Last week, the Iranian authorities said Mr. Hajjarian had been moved to a site with access to doctors.

Mr. Dori-Najafabadi also said that about 100 people had been arrested every day after the post-election demonstrations began, and that there were efforts to release about the same number daily. There are nearly 200 detainees today, he said.

At the trial on Saturday, families of the defendants gathered outside the court and were attacked by riot police officers when they began chanting slogans, Web sites reported. Zahra Mir-Younessi, the wife of one of the detainees, and several others were arrested.

Inside the courtroom, the French researcher and an analyst at the British Embassy who have been accused of spying took the stand to apologize, saying they had wanted only to update their embassies on Iran's recent political turmoil.

The researcher, Clotilde Reiss, who was working at Isfahan University, said she had collected news and information about politics and the protests, and presented some of it to officials at the French Embassy in Tehran.

"I realize this was a mistake," she said, according to a transcript provided by the semiofficial Fars news agency. "I apologize to the court and the people of Iran, and I hope they will forgive me."

Hossein Rassam, a political analyst at the British Embassy in Tehran who is an Iranian citizen, also took the stand after espionage charges were read out against him. He said his job required him to gather information on Iranian politics and to convey it to his employers. He then expressed "regret," according to Fars, and asked for a pardon and an opportunity to make up for any action that might have harmed the government.

His lawyer then rose to say that Mr. Rassam's activities were not spying, but the requirements of his job at the embassy.

The trial, which opened the previous Saturday, has included confessions by prominent reformist figures, whose friends and relatives said they had been coerced through torture. The confessions Saturday appeared to be part of a strategy to link the opposition, which maintains that President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's](#) landslide re-election on June 12 was rigged, to foreign powers.

The court appearances followed more than a month of intense diplomatic efforts by Britain and France to persuade Iran not to charge the two embassy employees and the researcher.

Britain's foreign secretary, David Miliband, said that the charges against Mr. Rassam were unjustified and that the action against Mr. Rassam and Ms. Reiss "only brings further discredit on the Iranian regime."

The French government demanded that Iran immediately release Ms. Reiss and its embassy staff member, Nazak Afshar, saying espionage accusations against them were baseless.

Mr. Miliband said Britain had raised its concerns in a meeting in Tehran between Britain's ambassador and the Iranian deputy foreign minister, and in London, where a Foreign Office official met with Iran's ambassador. Officials at the Foreign Office had previously said they believed that they had assurances from Iran that Mr. Rassam would not face trial.

British officials, speaking anonymously in accordance with diplomatic protocol, have said Mr. Rassam appeared to have been chosen as a scapegoat after Ayatollah Khamenei identified Britain as a target during the protests after the election.

In a speech at Friday Prayer in Tehran, Ayatollah Khamenei said Britain, with a long history of colonial interference in Iran, was leading a covert international effort to manipulate the outcome of the election.

As in last weekend's session, prosecutors began Saturday by reading a long, wide-ranging list of accusations that seemed to implicate any Western organization with an interest in Iran — including media organizations, rights groups and research institutes — in a vast, seditious plot.

The other defendants on trial Saturday included two prominent political analysts, Ahmad Zeidabadi and Bijan Khajepour, as well as people the government said were members of a monarchist group and a terrorist group and who were accused of planning bombings.

One defendant accused of planning bombings at the time of the elections, Muhammad-Reza Ali-Zamani, testified that he had met a number of foreigners. They included an American intelligence official in Iraqi Kurdistan known as "Frank" who he said had given him money, a phone and other assistance.

*Robert F. Worth reported from Beirut, and Nazila Fathi from Toronto. John F. Burns contributed reporting from Cambridge, England.*

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