

Doc Number: EU000255

The New York Times

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT
SPONSORED BY

August 25, 2009

Reformer in Iran Publishes Account of a Prison Rape

By [MICHAEL SLACKMAN](#)

CAIRO — A young man arrested after the disputed presidential election in [Iran](#) says he was raped by his jailers, then questioned by officials who blamed him for the attack and embarrassed him, according to a statement on the [party Web site](#) of an Iranian reform leader, Mehdi Karroubi.

Mr. Karroubi, a former speaker of Parliament and presidential candidate, has defied the nation's top leaders who have tried, with little success, to discredit and silence charges of rape and torture. But Mr. Karroubi warned that this was only a "fragment" of the evidence he had and that if the denials did not stop, he would release even more.

While the young man was not identified, his charges were graphic and emotional, and documented official indifference — even callousness — toward his account.

"I was in prison, I was blindfolded and my hands were tied," the young man told Mr. Karroubi. "I was beaten nearly to death, and worse than all of that, they did something to me which even unbelievers and idol worshipers would denounce."

The conflict over the June 12 presidential election has undermined the legitimacy and credibility of the government and caused deep division in the ranks of the political and clerical elite. But [the charges of rape and torture](#) have struck directly at the moral and religious authority the nation's theocratic leaders claim. The government initially denied Mr. Karroubi's charges, and the speaker of Parliament, Ali Larijani, [said a review had proved they were baseless](#).

But Mr. Karroubi has refused to back down even as clerics and military leaders aligned with the government have called for his arrest. Faced with public disgust and outrage, the Parliament agreed to review his evidence. A parliamentary committee met with Mr. Karroubi on Monday. One member, Kazem Jalili, told Iranian news agencies that Mr. Karroubi had said that four people told him they had been raped.

For the president, [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#), Mr. Karroubi's provocative move threatens to add yet another complication as he battles with Parliament over his 21 nominees for his cabinet. It also comes at a difficult time for the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, who by law and faith is supposed to embody one of the central qualities cherished throughout the history of Shiite Islam: justice.

The young man's account challenges the notion that the state is run by a "just leader." He said that one day, when Mr. Karroubi was filming their discussion, three government men came to Mr. Karroubi's office to question him. The young man agreed to go with them to visit a doctor.

On the way, he said, "I asked them why they had done this, why they had treated us like this, what had we

done?”

The response was, “When the supreme leader confirmed the election result, everyone should have recognized it.”

The failure to deal comprehensively with these charges — and the unceasing daily revelations of new offenses — has further fueled the crisis.

On Saturday, the first day of [Ramadan](#), dozens of men and women turned up outside the gates of Evin prison in north Tehran to observe iftar, the sunset meal that breaks the daily fast for the holy month of Ramadan. They wanted information about their friends and relatives inside.

On Sunday, the authorities told them no meals were allowed, so the men and women stood before the imposing blue gate with flasks of warm sweet tea and homemade desserts. Then on Monday, more than 150 people showed up, demanding to visit with friends and family inside.

Each day served as another example of people’s willingness to defy the government’s efforts to silence criticism of the government crackdown after the election, which has led to dozens of deaths, thousands of arrests — and now, the continued detention of once-prominent journalists, government officials, academics and protesters.

With each day come new charges of abuse behind the prison walls. On Monday, the wife of Abdollah Momeni told the [Green Freedom Wave Web site](#), associated with the reform leader Mir Hussein Moussavi, that she had not heard from her husband in 20 days, not since she was allowed a brief visit with him in the prison yard. Mr. Momeni is a spokesman for the Iran Alumni Association, a human rights group open to university graduates.

“My husband is under tremendous psychological and physical pressure and torture,” she was quoted as saying.

Mr. Momeni and others were being held at Evin, built by Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and expanded by the revolution’s clerical leaders.

Prisoners live in crowded cells with a sink. Showers are three times a week. The prisoners can walk circles for exercise, a few days each week for no more than 30 minutes.

The government has insisted that no one has been abused.

When a former vice president, the usually rotund cleric Muhammad Ali Abtahi, was shown on television during a courtroom appearance — forced to wear pajamas — he appeared gaunt and haggard. This week, a government official said that was not a sign of abuse, but of Mr. Abtahi’s improved health.

“It is only natural for a person who has gained an excessive amount of weight to come to his senses in prison that being overweight is not good for your mental or physical health,” said the official, Ali Akbar Javanfekr, President Ahmadinejad’s adviser for press affairs, according to Iranian news services.

In his statement to Mr. Karroubi, the young man who said he was raped said that in his case, his

questioners suggested he was to blame, even asking if he enjoyed the attack. Then they threatened him.

“While we were waiting, the officer told me he didn’t think anyone was capable of such an act and accused me of lying,” the man said. “He asked me if I realized the kind of trouble I would get into if I couldn’t prove the charges.”

[Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
