

## HRW: Bahrain Tortures Shia Activists

Written by Human Rights Watch

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Bahrain needs to take urgent steps to end torture and ill-treatment of security suspects during interrogation, Human Rights Watch said in a [report](#) released today. The government should promptly investigate all torture allegations and prosecute security officials suspected of abusing detainees.

The 89-page report, [“Torture Redux: The Revival of Physical Coercion during Interrogations in Bahrain”](#), is based on interviews with former detainees and a review of forensic medical reports and court documents. It concludes that since the end of 2007, officials have repeatedly resorted to torture for the apparent purpose of securing confessions from security suspects.

“Torture is back in the repertoire of Bahrain's security services,” said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “The return of torture is especially distressing since Bahrain showed the political will a decade ago to end this scourge.”

Bahrain's reversion to these discredited practices has come with rising political tensions. Street demonstrations by young men from the country's majority Shia Muslim population protesting alleged discrimination by the Sunni-dominated government have deteriorated with increasing regularity into violent confrontations with security forces. Arrests have often followed. Security officials appear to be using painful physical techniques to elicit confessions from many of those arrested.

These techniques include electro-shock devices, suspension in painful positions, and beatings. Some of those who were detained reported that security officials threatened to kill or rape them or members of their families. Many were subjected to more than one of these practices.

The use of these techniques, separately and in combination, violates Bahrain's own laws as well as its obligations as a state party to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture) and other international treaties.

“The government should promptly investigate all torture allegations and prosecute offenders according to international fair trial standards,” Stork said. “Authorities should also suspend immediately any security official if credible evidence exists that he ordered, carried out, or acquiesced in acts of torture.”

Officials with the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecution Office, in separate meetings with Human Rights Watch, denied that security forces employed torture. They said the consistency in the accounts of the former detainees was evidence that the allegations had been fabricated.

Human Rights Watch found, however, that the accounts of abuse matched those that

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detainees had raised earlier in court proceedings and to their lawyers. In addition, some detainees had been held in solitary confinement at the time they first reported abuse, reducing the opportunities for them to fabricate accounts.

Most significant, the medical reports by government doctors, along with various court papers, provided the strongest corroboration of the former detainees' allegations. In one case, the court acquitted all defendants on all charges in part because it concluded - on the basis of medical reports - that the defendants had been physically coerced into confessing.

Human Rights Watch urged the government to investigate as well whether prosecutors responded appropriately to the detainees' allegations of torture or whether the prosecutors' actions made them complicit in abuse. Where there is credible evidence that a prosecutor or other state agent was complicit in torture, the government should pursue appropriate sanctions, Human Rights Watch said.

Source: Human Rights Watch