

Election-related detention and torture in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): a submission to the UK Home Office Country Policy and Information Team June 2018

The use of torture in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is well documented. The following research demonstrates that torture is used by President Joseph Kabila's government against perceived political opponents involved in election-related activities.

This briefing presents preliminary findings from a planned wider study on the use of torture in a political context in the DRC. It is based on a systematic review of 16 medico-legal reports produced by Freedom from Torture, documenting election-related detention and torture in the DRC between 2011 and 2016, during President Kabila's term of office.

Freedom from Torture observes with alarm that two United Kingdom (UK) Home Office Country Policy and Information Notes (CPIN) on the DRC from December 2017 - "Opposition to the government" and "Women fearing gender-based harm or violence" - do not include reference to the practice of torture. We note that the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information in the United Kingdom has recently reviewed these CPINs and that they are in the process of being revised. Freedom from Torture would like to draw the attention of the Home Office to a number of key findings from our research to consider for inclusion in the revised CPINs.

Key findings

- This research provides evidence of the use of torture by state actors to punish and suppress political opposition in the DRC.
- All 16 men and women whose cases are featured in this briefing describe torture at the hands of state actors, often carried out while held in unofficial detention facilities, because of election-related political activities.
- Forensic medical reports for all these survivors document evidence of physical and psychological torture. All but one were sexually tortured and almost half of them were gang-raped while in custody.
- Beyond their own experiences of torture, survivors also witnessed or were otherwise aware of the death of fellow detainees, including as a result of torture.
- All survivors were held incommunicado throughout their detention without the observation of due process rights.
- The perpetration or co-ordination of torture by state agents demonstrated in this case set, or tacit complicity with the use of torture, indicates the endemic nature of torture in the detention context in the DRC.

Recommendations

The Home Office should acknowledge the ongoing practice of torture of political opponents for exercising their right to free expression, association, and assembly and the absence of due process in the DRC and ensure these trends are included in the revised Country Policy and Information Notes.

Introduction

Political violence has escalated ahead of the scheduled December 2018 elections, with the UN Human Rights Office and the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) documenting in March 2018 “killings and other serious human rights violations due to the use of excessive force by security services and defence forces in relation to mass protests”.ⁱ

Despite the international spotlight on the political situation and the deteriorating security situation in Kasai and North and South Kivu, and with the DRC facing one of the world’s most serious humanitarian crises,ⁱⁱ there is little attention on the treatment of persons who are detained for expressing dissenting political views.

Freedom from Torture’s evidence, combined with allegations of torture reported by other human rights organisations and the United Nations, highlight the heightened risk of arbitrary detention and torture for perceived political opponents in the DRC and the government’s ongoing failure to take meaningful action to address the problem, including through investigating allegations and bringing perpetrators to justice.ⁱⁱⁱ Freedom from Torture is concerned that in an election year DRC state authorities will escalate the use of arbitrary detention and torture as a means of punishing and suppressing legitimate political expression, as documented in this briefing.

Background

Freedom from Torture is the only charity in the UK dedicated solely to supporting torture survivors who seek refuge here, and is one of the largest centres in the world for the forensic documentation of torture. Our doctors document physical and psychological evidence of torture in medico-legal reports, in accordance with the international standard of the UN Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the “Istanbul Protocol”).^{iv} Each is subject to a clinical and legal review process.

For the past 10 years the DRC has been in the top ten countries of origin for survivors who are referred to us for medico-legal reports and clinical services including therapy. In 2014, Freedom from Torture published evidence of the torture of 34 women by state security agents in the DRC documented in their medico-legal reports. It described the extensive use of rape and other forms of sexual torture against women detained mostly for political reasons, and the use of a variety of other torture methods including beating and burning, as well as psychological and environmental forms of torture. The 2014 report also highlighted the lack of access to justice, including due process, and appropriate services for women survivors of torture in the DRC, as well as the impunity of suspected perpetrators.^v

Since this report, the Medico-Legal Report Service at Freedom from Torture has prepared a further 90 medico-legal reports for DRC torture survivors. Of these, 76 consented to use of their medical report for research purposes. Screening shows that 70 were detained on political grounds. These cases will form the basis of a planned wider Freedom from Torture study on the use of torture in a political context in the DRC.

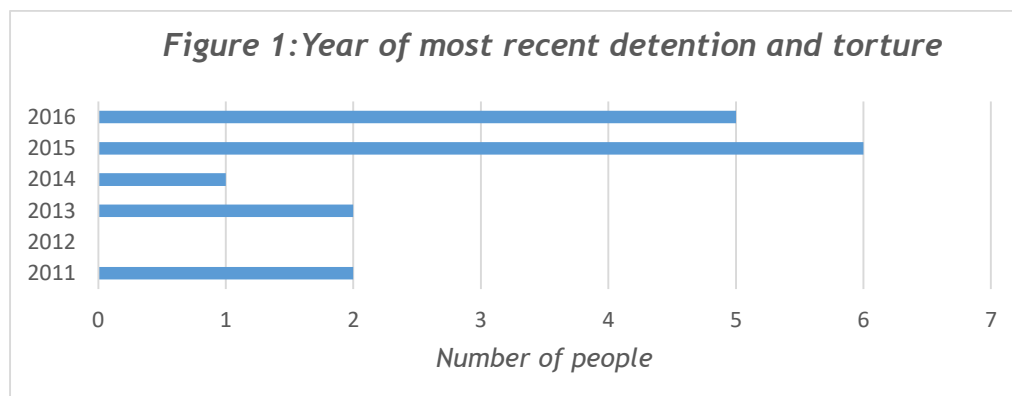
Case set

This briefing presents summary findings from the analysis of a preliminary case set of 16 of these 70 medico-legal reports, all of which involve detention related to political activities carried out during an election period. This was broadly defined and included cases where the person, or their associate, has been involved in political activities during an election

period or during protests or other activities related to the holding of an election or an election result.

According to the selection criteria, the case set is derived from medico-legal reports produced for DRC nationals by the Medico-Legal Report Service at Freedom from Torture since the data set of our previous report (1 January 2013) up to January 2018, where i) the most recent episode of detention and torture was for election-related activity and ii) consent was given for the medico-legal report to be used for research.

The most recent detention episodes documented in the 16 cases analysed for this briefing span the years 2011 to 2016, with most taking place during 2015 and 2016 (see Figure 1).



Seven of the 16 people in the case set had experienced prior detention episodes. Five of these had been detained on three previous occasions, and one person five times. In each case, the most recent episode of detention and torture was related to election activity and ultimately forced them to flee the DRC and seek asylum in the UK.

It is likely that people detained and tortured during more recent election-related violence have not yet reached Freedom from Torture's services as there is typically a significant delay between the incidence of torture and the production by our specialist doctors of a forensic report. This is due to, among other things, the time it takes for a torture survivor to escape or otherwise secure release from detention, leave the country, arrive in the UK and be referred to Freedom from Torture for a medico-legal report.

The majority of people in the case set are female (13, 81%), and three are male. Most were young adults at the time of their most recent detention and torture. Three quarters were 25 or under (12), half of whom were 21 or under (6). In all the cases where it is known, the location of normal residence was the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, as was their location at the point of detention.

Torture Evidence

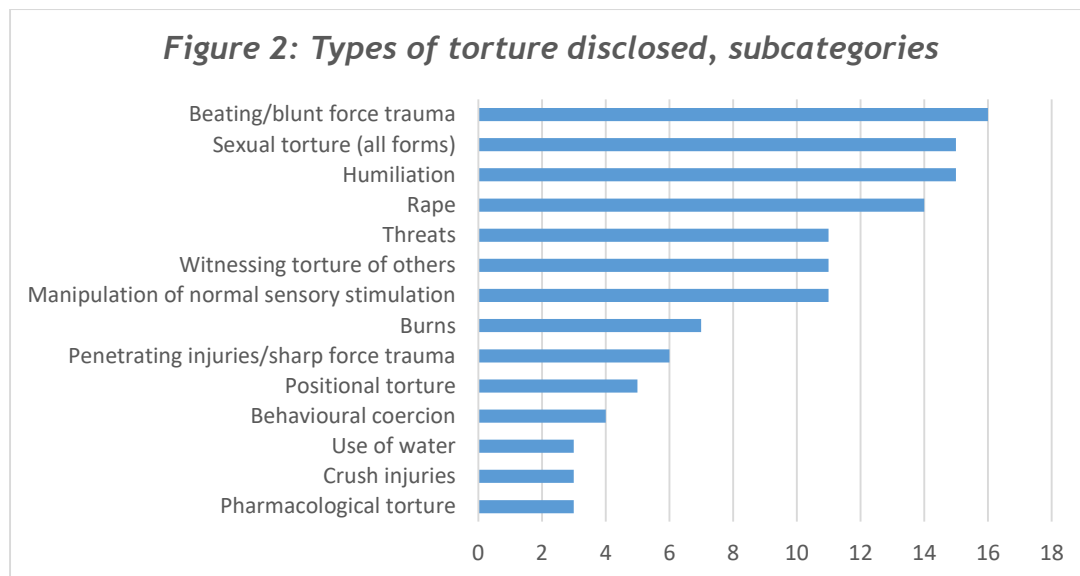
Torture methods

Forensic medical reports for all 16 individuals document forms of violence and ill-treatment defined as torture, breaching their fundamental human rights.

All survivors had experienced both physical and psychological forms of torture during their most recent detention episode (see Figure 2). This included beating with various instruments, burning with cigarettes and other implements, threats and humiliation. Fifteen of the 16 women and men experienced sexual torture, of whom 14 disclosed rape (11 women

and all three men). Eleven described forms of environmental torture involving the deprivation or manipulation of normal sensory stimulation. One quarter reported that they lost consciousness at some point during episodes of torture.

Most people described more than one incidence of torture whilst in detention; three quarters experienced more than three incidences.



Sexual torture

A striking feature of this case set is the extremely high incidence of sexual torture (15, 94%). Fourteen people (11 women and all three men, 88% of all cases) experienced some form of rape (anal, vaginal and/or oral), of whom most experienced multiple rapes. Nearly half were raped by a group of people. People found it difficult to specify how many perpetrators there were. One person who was anally raped described four guards in the room but didn't know if they "all had their turn".

Other forms of sexual torture include being forcibly held naked or partially naked throughout the detention or incidence of torture (5 and 4 people respectively), and sexual assault by touching of the breasts and/or genitals (4 people).

"[She] was raped vaginally and anally 'many' times by guards. She bled profusely from the vagina from 'wounds' there. The rapes took place in the cell and the victim was selected randomly. She witnessed other women being raped. ... After the rapes she bled profusely and became very weak. She was taken to a hospital barely conscious; she does not know why the guards did this for her [sic]; she had seen others die of their wounds."
 Medico-legal report excerpt*

As an additional form of humiliation and source of shame, some people described being forced to witness the sexual torture of another or were subjected to sexual torture in front of witnesses (4 people in each case).

“She knows that there were different soldiers during her detention that would ill-treat her but cannot be specific about number. ‘I was so scared, it’s impossible for me to know that.’ She estimates there were between two and four men but the number would vary each time. She was raped three times by the same soldiers who ill-treated her. She was woken from sleep for the purpose of the rape and taken out of the room she was detained in. She thinks that three different soldiers were involved and she would be raped by two of them at any one time.”

Medico-legal report excerpt*

Ten of the 14 people who were raped described multiple instances that took place throughout detention episodes ranging from one to nine months in duration. For some this was a daily or nightly occurrence, while others struggled to put a number on how many times they had been raped, saying instead “many times” or “repeatedly”. On one occasion a man was told to climb on a table and was beaten until he was semi-conscious so that “they could do whatever they wanted”. One woman described being raped every night by three men “as punishment”. Another medico-legal report described how “if she resisted any of the sexual assaults, she would be hit until she gave in”. A third woman described how if she tried to resist rape this would enrage the soldiers who would beat her. On one occasion, as she struggled and they restrained her, she was burned with a metal implement.

Physical torture

The most prevalent form of physical torture reported by all 16 people was different forms of beating or blunt force trauma, using instruments such as wooden sticks, truncheons, belts, rubber batons known as “ngondo” and rubber cords. Some also described being dragged or slammed against a hard surface, while others were punched and kicked. One person described daily beatings over a period of six weeks in detention; one described three or four daily beatings over a period of two months; one was beaten around four times per week over a period of three months.

“On arrival ... they were beaten with truncheons and sticks and [she] was hit ‘all over’; on her arms, legs, and back but not her head ... [She] hit her head which has left a mark ... and she lost consciousness. Her ... elbow was injured at this time. ... ‘They came just to beat us every day’. [She] was beaten with wooden sticks and truncheons, and kicked by men with heavy boots on their feet. She was whipped with barbed wire leaving marks ... The prisoners were pushed into one another and against the wall ... She was injured ... when hit with a wooden stick. The skin split and then became infected leaving a large scar at the site. Her teeth became loosened by blows and some were later removed in the UK.”

Medico-legal report excerpt*

Just under half of the individuals were burned, most commonly with cigarettes. One person was burned on the breasts and upper abdomen with hot candle wax, two with heated metal and a further person with wood from a fire. Three people described being burned when they attempted to resist rape or sexual assault.

Three people experienced crush injuries, including crushing of the genitals between a soldier's boot and the ground. Over a third reported biting, cutting, stabbing or puncturing including with barbed wire and knives. One person was bitten when she attempted to resist oral rape, which left a skin flap and white flesh visible.

Six people described different forms of positional torture including prolonged binding, forced stress positions and suspension. One woman was tied by the ankle to other prisoners in her cell. They were forced to move by jumping when ordered out of the cell. Another's arms and neck were restrained by a guard whilst another raped her. One man was held in a forced stress position while sexual torture was carried out.

"Throughout the interrogation he was beaten. He was made to lie face down on the floor and his wrists and ankles were placed inside Velcro-type straps attached to the lengths of rope. These ropes were then attached to metal fixings in the floor so that he was held in a spread eagle position with his hands above the level of his head. Another rope was tied around his genitals and passed between his legs. This was intermittently tugged on. The soldiers also forced their booted feet between his legs and pressed his testicles between the toe of their boot and the ground."

Medico-legal report excerpt*

Less commonly reported were forms of pharmacological torture, such as forced consumption of a drug or chemical or withholding of medication, described by three people. One person was subdued with a chemical-soaked handkerchief when she was arrested and woke to find she was naked from the waist down and had been raped. Another person described being forced to drink a liquid from a rusty can that made him feel lethargic afterwards.

Psychological torture

All 16 survivors described some form of psychological torture. This included 10 people who were directly threatened with death (63%). One teenage girl was told that she would be killed if she "didn't stop belonging to that group" (Filimbi, a youth focused civil society group). Another was told he was going to be killed because he belonged to the Baluba ethnic group. A further person was told "We got you. You will suffer. You will be killed like those in your leaflets".

"The men became very violent with her and two in particular seemed intent on raping her. They ordered her to take her clothes off or they would kill her. When the first man was trying to rape her she was resisting but they were beating her heavily. ... The men were armed with guns..... 'I had to give up'."

Medico-legal report excerpt*

Humiliation is an aspect of the sexual torture experienced by 15 people in the case set, as described above. Four people described other forms of humiliation, including degrading verbal abuse; being forced to clean toilets or soiled cells with bare hands; being forced to soil oneself due to lack of access to a toilet or wash facilities and being given urine to drink. One person was coerced to ingest urine and another forced to "bathe" in a pool of excrement.

It is notable how many people witnessed the torture of others (11, 69%). Most commonly, this took the form of hearing or seeing others being tortured. However, one person described

how people often urinated on the floor when they were returned to the cell unconscious following, it was assumed, incidences of torture. Another person noted that all of the women held in her cell were called by name at regular intervals and taken away to be raped.

It is also striking how many people witnessed or were otherwise aware of the deaths of fellow detainees, including as a result of torture. Four people witnessed other people being led to their actual or suspected death, two witnessed extra-judicial killings being carried out and one other person mentioned that they saw dead bodies. Three people described the existence of “kill lists”.

“She was pulled next to a prepared hole in the ground... The commander came close to her and called her by name. She recognised him as a boyfriend of hers from the past... He was clearly shocked to see her there and said to her ‘I have seen your name on the list of people to be eliminated. You are trying to incite the population to cause trouble and campaign against the government. If you are here, they will kill you. I will do my best to save your life.’”

Medico-legal report excerpt*

“There were two men ... who were in a ‘critical’ condition and looked as though they had been beaten up badly. At this moment ... [she] started to think that she was going to be killed ... [She] recalled how soldiers came in and took the two men out... She heard the men crying and shouting. She heard one man say ‘Do not bury me alive. You can shoot me. Do not bury me alive. Then there was silence.’”

Medico-legal report excerpt*

Environmental torture

Eleven people described forms of environmental torture that involve the deprivation or manipulation of normal sensory stimulation (69%). This includes four people who were forced to gaze at the sun, while others described environmental conditions that included being held in solitary confinement, being deprived of natural light or a sense of time, being hooded or otherwise kept in constant darkness.

Detention Evidence

Reason for detention

All 16 people had some involvement in legitimate expressions of political opinion and most were associated with one of the main opposition parties or human rights groups in the DRC. Eight people identified themselves as activists, supporters or members of the main opposition party, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). They were involved in a range of activities such as distributing leaflets; attending and/or organising meetings, protests and rallies; and/or canvassing and recruiting members. Others were affiliated with local non-governmental or human rights organisations.

In all but three cases, the most recent episode of detention and torture referred to in this briefing was linked to the person’s own involvement in political opposition during an election period or during protests or other activities related to the holding of an election. Most were detained during or following a demonstration or rally in Kinshasa, including the following nine people, detained during election-related protests:

Protests in 2011 related to disputed election outcome

Two people were arrested in November and December 2011 at protests against President Joseph Kabila's declaration of victory in the election. Protestors supported a rival claim to power declared by his main challenger, then leader of the UDPS, Etienne Tshisekedi.^{vi} Numerous cases of arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment were reported by the UN, particularly among supporters of the political opposition.^{vii}

Protests in 2015 related to delay of elections scheduled for 2016

Three people were detained in mid-January 2015 at demonstrations following proposed changes to the electoral laws that would have required a national census ahead of the next election, thereby significantly delaying elections scheduled for 2016. The UN and Human Rights Watch reported on the use of "disproportionate force", the death of numerous demonstrators, and other alleged human rights violations carried out by state security agents in Kinshasa.^{viii}

Protests in 2016 related to extension of Kabila's term of office beyond two-term limit

Four people were detained at demonstrations in 2016 in the context of violent suppression by state security of nationwide opposition protests against President Joseph Kabila. In 2016 the UN, human rights organisations and media sources reported on increasing restrictions on civil and political rights in the DRC; harassment and intimidation of the political opposition, human rights defenders and journalists; and multiple killings and arrests of demonstrators and others during security operations related to street demonstrations and other political protests.^{ix}

Two people were detained due to the political actions of a close family member and one person was detained for refusing to fraudulently sign ballot papers some years earlier, when working as an election monitor at a polling station. They had left the country following harassment and threats, and were arrested in the DRC having been forcibly returned.

Detaining authority and treatment in transit

State actors including the police, state security and military detained all 16 people, according to information available. No-one reported being detained by non-state actors. However, in most cases the detaining authority was not uniformed and the interchangeability of the words for "soldier" and "police" in Lingala means that the specific state agency is in some cases uncertain. Despite this, specific authorities were mentioned by some people, including the Congolese Police Force (PNC, *Police Nationale Congolaise*) and the Congolese Intelligence Agency (ANR, *Agence Nationale de Renseignements*). One person recalled that the arresting military personnel were speaking in either English or Swahili with a different dialect to that spoken in the DRC.

During transit to the detention facility, half of the individuals experienced physical violence. People described being stamped on with booted feet, beaten with belts, and hit with rifle butts. Two people were hit so hard in the face with the butt of a gun that they were left semi-conscious. Six people were threatened or humiliated in transit, a further five were physically restrained by use of handcuffs, two were blindfolded and one person was subdued

with a chemical-soaked handkerchief. One person described being raped on arrest whilst others watched.

“They shouted at her ‘you are the people who are against the President’ hitting her across the face and telling her to ‘shut my mouth’. They handcuffed her wrists in front of her using metal handcuffs, she was screaming and they wrapped a piece of cloth over her mouth which they tied behind her head so that she could not speak. One of the men raped her whilst the others watched. She was then taken outside and put onto the floor of a pick-up truck. She was still handcuffed and gagged and the men, who were wearing boots, stamped their feet on her body and kicked her. They verbally abused her”

Medico-legal report excerpt*

Perpetrators and use of torture

All perpetrators of torture were also reported to be state officials. Most commonly these were described as prison guards (10 people), as well as military, and intelligence officials. Survivors specifically mentioned the involvement of the Congolese Intelligence Agency (ANR), the Presidential military guards (Bala Lura), the elite Presidential Guards (Katanga Republican Guards), as well as the presence of Rwandan, South African, Tanzanian, and Ugandan soldiers, including perpetrators speaking in Swahili or English in an unfamiliar accent.

Many survivors described being tortured by different people during several incidences of torture. Indeed 10 people described specific instances where they were tortured by a group of people, all of whom were involved in perpetrating the abuse. The coordination or tacit complicity of many different actors described in these cases indicates that the practice of torture by DRC state agents is embedded in the detention context.

“She was woken from sleep for the purpose of the rape and taken out of the room she was detained in. She thinks that three different soldiers were involved and she would be raped by two of them at any one time. She was pushed onto her knees and raped vaginally and anally. She was also raped orally. ‘They did everything to me’. They did not use a condom and she thinks they ejaculated. She would try to resist and this would enrage the soldiers and they would beat her.”

Medico-legal report excerpt*

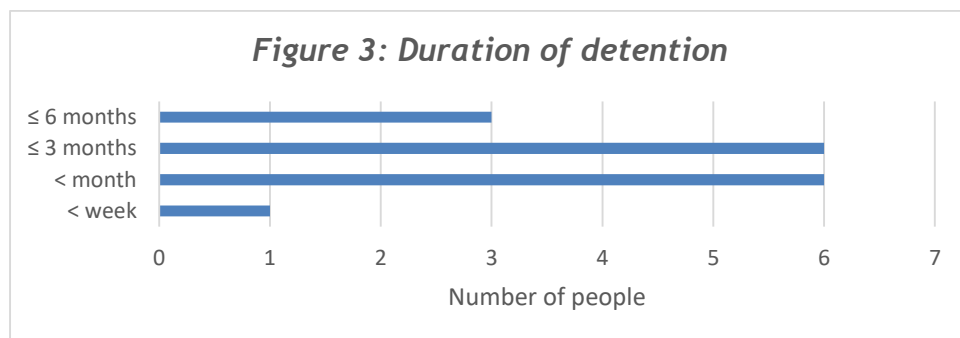
Most commonly, survivors described torture being used as punishment for their involvement in political activities, based on what was said to them by the perpetrators whilst they were inflicting the abuse (7). Some described being asked for information whilst being tortured and four people were tortured in the context of more formal interrogation.

Location and duration of detention

Other than in one case where the location is not known, all were detained in Kinshasa and held in different facilities in and around the capital.

Seven people were held in unofficial detention facilities, including buildings in the countryside or forest, two of which were only partially built. One person was held in the “Marble Palace” - former President Laurent Désiré Kabila’s residence. Of the remaining eight people, four were held in a prison, two in a police station and one each in an intelligence facility and military facility. Six named facilities were: Kasavubu police station, Kokolo military camp, Lingwala police station, Kinmasiere prison, Circo prison and Makala prison - all of which are in Kinshasa.^x

All 16 people were detained for relatively short periods, ranging from less than a week to six months, before managing to secure some form of informal release or escape. The most commonly reported length of detention was between one and three months (see Figure 3).



All 16 people were released informally or escaped from detention, one person when they were transferred to hospital. Three people reported that relatives had bribed officials in order to secure their release. In seven other cases captors assisted people to leave detention informally or to escape due to a shared ethnicity or family connection. Thirteen people left the DRC within three months of their release or escape (81%).

“On one occasion a man who she thought was [a senior official] called her name and took her away in the normal way to rape her. She fought him and he pushed her to the ground and stabbed ... her ... with something sharp and metallic. She began to shout ‘why are you doing this to me. I’m a married woman and I’m pregnant’, this time using her native language ... The warden recognised the language and replied in it asking if she was from the ... tribe which she belonged to. His manner changed at that point and he told her that because she was from the same tribe as him that he would protect her saying that she was ‘like a daughter’.”

Medico-legal report excerpt*

Detention conditions

All but one person described very poor detention conditions. Most commonly reported was unhygienic conditions (15, 94%), followed by irregular or contaminated food or water (13, 81%) and a small or overcrowded cell (12, 75%). Seven people reported no access to toilet facilities and a further four had limited or restricted access to a toilet meaning they had to urinate and defecate on the cell floor.

While three people were held in solitary confinement at some point during their detention, 12 described over-crowded and cramped conditions in shared cells. In some cases, this meant that people were unable to move freely about the cell or have sufficient space to lie down and sleep. One person said that the only position they could adopt was to sit with

their knees drawn up at 90 degrees in front of them, which caused considerable pain in their knees. Conditions were also described as very hot and lacking any ventilation.

Detention safeguards and due process

A striking feature of these cases is that, according to the information available, all 16 people were detained by state authorities without due process according to international human rights standards. All were detained arbitrarily and all held incommunicado throughout a detention episode during which they suffered torture.

Detaining authorities were not individually identifiable at the point of arrest or throughout the detention, even those few wearing uniform. Only one person was presented with an arrest warrant. No-one was given access to a lawyer at any point during their detention. All “administrative” aspects of detention were denied. Detainees were not photographed, fingerprinted or formally registered and their family members were not officially informed of their detention. They were not informed of the charges against them and none had their case heard before a judicial authority. One person was sentenced to 20 years for “inciting the population to hatred” and for an “attempt on the dignity of the Head of State” but without a trial.

“They came to get me....this was my trial’ and told her she had been condemned to twenty years imprisonment. She was accused of ‘inciting the population to hatred’ and an ‘attempt on the dignity of the Head of State’ no opportunity was given for her to speak or defend herself, or for her to be represented. When she asked, ‘what did I do?’ there was no answer given. At this she said, ‘I despaired...this was the end ... I was waiting for death to come’.”

Medico-legal report excerpt

One person was taken to a hospital as a result of the torture they suffered, from where they managed to escape with the help of a nurse. Two individuals said that sympathetic guards clandestinely gave them medication to treat wounds caused by torture whilst in detention: a policeman brought aspirin and a woman who brought food also gave antibiotics. Otherwise the remaining 13 people received no medical treatment in detention, including one who suffered a sickle cell episode.

Impacts of torture

In all 16 cases Freedom from Torture clinicians documented forensic evidence of the physical and/or psychological impacts of torture described by survivors.^{xi}

Physical impacts

Independent doctors working on behalf of Freedom from Torture documented lesions attributed to torture in all 15 people who underwent a physical examination. In one case 72 lesions attributed to torture were recorded. One person did not undergo a physical examination because they did not believe that they had any permanent lesions from the time of their detention.

Most survivors reported ongoing pain symptoms related to torture (14, 88%). This included musculoskeletal pain in different parts of the body, including pelvis, shoulder, wrist, back, knee, abdomen, legs, as well as headaches. These symptoms were associated with various torture methods, including beatings, rape, positional torture, and conditions experienced in detention.

Many reported other ongoing physical disorders arising from torture, most commonly genito-urinary, at the time that the medico-legal report was prepared (11 people, 69%).

Psychological impacts

Doctors found psychological evidence of torture in all 16 people. Symptoms met the diagnostic threshold of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 13 cases (81%), with the remaining three people experiencing a number of symptoms of PTSD. Twelve people were also diagnosed with a depressive disorder (75%), and two others with symptoms of depression.

Psychological responses specifically attributed to rape and other forms of sexual torture included the following: generalised fear, anxiety about the future, lack of trust in people, fear of sexual intimacy and dislike of one's own body, feeling unclean, persistent nightmares and flashbacks, avoidance of men, profound feelings of shame and guilt and low self-esteem. Some described feeling somehow responsible for what had happened to them.

“She has difficulty sleeping most nights. She has periods which last for several weeks when she awakens three or four times a week with nightmares and flashbacks ‘as if it’s still happening’ relating to her experiences of ill treatment and being raped. ... She feels ashamed of having being raped. She told me that her shame means that she ‘cannot feel anything’. In her culture adultery ... is absolutely banned and [she] blames herself for this.”

Medico-legal report excerpt*

Eleven people reported having ideas of self-harm or suicide as a result of the torture they experienced (69%), with one person having attempted suicide and one person assessed as presenting a risk of suicide at the time that the medico-legal report was produced.

About Freedom from Torture

Freedom from Torture is the only UK-based human rights organisation dedicated to the treatment and rehabilitation of torture survivors. We do this by offering services across England and Scotland to around 1,000 torture survivors a year, including psychological and physical therapies, forensic documentation of torture, legal and welfare advice, and creative projects.

Since our establishment in 1985, more than 61,000 survivors of torture have been referred to us, and we are one of the world's largest torture treatment centres. Our expert clinicians prepare medico-legal reports that are used in connection with torture survivors' claims for international protection, and in research reports aimed at holding torturing states to account. We are the only human rights organisation in the UK that systematically uses evidence from in-house clinicians, and the torture survivors they work with, to hold torturing states accountable internationally; and to work towards a world free from torture.

To find out more about Freedom from Torture please visit: www.freedomfromtorture.org

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About our Torture Accountability Programme

Through our Torture Accountability Programme, we work to expose torture in order to support efforts to strengthen prevention, secure justice and ensure international protection for survivors. Survivor voices and expertise are at the heart of this work.

About our Research Methodology

Information is collected through a systematic review of the individual medico-legal reports in the identified case set and recorded on a customised database. The data is anonymised, aggregated and systemically analysed.

Medico-legal reports are detailed forensic reports documenting physical and psychological evidence of torture and are considered to be a primary data source, since they provide first-hand testimony of torture and clinical evidence related to that testimony.

Medico-legal reports are commissioned by the person's legal representative and prepared by specialist doctors according to the standards set out in the UN Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, known as the "Istanbul Protocol".^{xii} Each is subject to a detailed clinical and legal review process.

For further information, please contact research@freedomfromtorture.org

ⁱ UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (UNOHCHR), Unlawful, unjustified and disproportionate use of force against protestors in DR Congo - UN report. UNOHCHR news [online]. 19 March 2018 [accessed 23/05/2018]. Available at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22842&LangID=E>.

ⁱⁱ UN, 1 March 2018, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, 1 March 2018, section II, D. Humanitarian situation, para. 25, p. 7. [Online]. [Accessed 23/05/2018]. Available at: <http://undocs.org/S/2018/174>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Human Rights Watch, 7 May 2018, DR Congo: Fears for Health of Detained Activist [Online]. [Accessed 29/05/2018]. Available at:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/07/dr-congo-fears-health-detained-activist>;

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^{iv} UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (UNOHCHR), *Istanbul Protocol, Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*. [Online]. New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2014. [Accessed 16/05/2018]. Available at:

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^x Note that the spelling used in this document corresponds to that used in the reviewed medico-legal reports.

^{xi} The extent to which evidence of torture can be documented varies depending on the methods used, especially as some methods of torture are designed to inflict maximum pain and psychological distress without leaving physical signs. The nature and severity of the physical and psychological consequences of torture will also vary between individuals, according to a wide range of factors.

^{xii} United Nations, *Istanbul Protocol*, 2004.