



LICADHO Report: Testimony of torture and ill-treatment

“I was tortured for no reason. When I was accused, I was violently beaten until I was unconscious. When I was given oxygen I became conscious for a while. Then I tried to explain to them that I did not do anything wrong. I was interrogated and beaten unconscious once again.”

On 26 June, International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, LICADHO releases new testimony and analysis of torture and ill-treatment in Cambodia’s police stations and prisons, including the abuse of females and juveniles and those experiencing mental health problems.

LICADHO’s findings reveal that there has been no palpable change in the type, frequency and severity of abuse reported in recent years. Inmates continue to describe being beaten, kicked, slapped or punched, often until they were bleeding and unconscious. Objects used during beatings included guns, sticks, iron rods, stun batons and electric cables. One of the primary purposes of abuse continued to be the forced extraction of confessions or money.

LICADHO also received reports of inmates being dragged on the ground by their hair; being forced to stand on one leg for prolonged periods; of guards standing and stamping on bodies and faces; objects being forced into mouths; cigarette burns; forced prolonged kneeling, including in direct sunlight; choking, and the use of electro-shock weaponry for torture.

“This alarming testimony leaves us in no doubt that Cambodian authorities are failing in their responsibilities to prevent and punish acts of torture and ill-treatment,” said Naly Pilorge, LICADHO Director, “Authorities appear to be incapable of fulfilling their obligations to end torture in Cambodia. Not only that, they also seem unwilling to take practical steps to address the ongoing abuse.”

Cambodia ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 2007. Among other things this protocol requires State Parties to establish an independent National Preventative Mechanism (NPM) within one year of ratification. Cambodia has failed to establish such a body, the primary purpose of which is to monitor and prevent torture and ill-treatment in places of detention. Instead, an inter-ministerial committee made up of various government officials was created in 2009. The committee is neither independent nor effective.

In addition to abuse by state officials in police stations and prisons, LICADHO regularly documents abuse by police and other security forces at the point of arrest and during transit to police stations. Once in prison, there is also abuse by other inmates, often under the direct order or with the acquiescence of prison authorities.

Additionally, LICADHO believes that conditions of detention in some places of detention, including the denial of appropriate medical treatment, may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Of particular concern are reports that people experiencing mental health problems are at risk of being targeted for abuse in prison and police custody.

LICADHO’s partner organization the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) Cambodia, the leading Cambodian NGO in the field of mental health and psychosocial interventions, has documented abuse consistent with the types of allegations received by LICADHO and has identified the long term effects of abuse on the mental well-being of their clients



TPO's clients in prison who have suffered or continue to suffer torture or ill-treatment have reported symptoms which include headaches, anxiety, depression, disturbed sleeping patterns, hearing voices, constant fear, being quick-tempered and angry and having startled reactions. Some TPO clients who experienced abuse have attempted suicide.

"Cambodian authorities should be ashamed that this type of abuse continues unabated, that protection measures are so weak, and recourse to justice so limited," said Nget Sokun, LICADHO's Prison Supervisor. "Sadly, LICADHO believes that the real rate of torture and ill-treatment is much higher than documented because so much abuse remains hidden."

It is impossible to know the true extent of torture and ill-treatment of detainees in Cambodia. It is clear however that many detainees continue to be subjected to physical and psychological mistreatment in state custody, that they have little recourse to effective complaints mechanisms and redress, and that those responsible are rarely brought to justice.

"For as long as the Cambodian courts continue to accept confessions obtained under duress, whilst men, women and children continue to be beaten, threatened and maimed in the custody of the state and whilst those who order, facilitate or commit torture do so with impunity, Cambodia's true commitment to the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment will remain in serious doubt." said Naly Pilorge.

LICADHO's report includes a set of twelve priority recommendations to the Cambodian authorities, including the preparation of specific anti-torture legislation, the establishment of a truly independent NPM and a civilian oversight body which can deal effectively with complaints against the police and other law enforcement personnel.

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