

TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT: THE STATE OF PRISONS IN TALIBAN-CONTROLLED AFGHANISTAN

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Rawadari is an Afghan human rights organisation that aims to deepen and grow the human rights culture of Afghanistan, ultimately reducing the suffering of all Afghans, especially women and girls. Rawadari helps build an Afghan human rights movement, monitors human rights violations, and pursues justice and accountability for violations. Rawadari works with individuals and collectives inside and outside Afghanistan.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

DFA	De-facto Authority
GDI	General Directorate of Intelligence
ICC	International Criminal Court
MoD	Ministry of Defence
Mol	Ministry of Interior
MPVPV	Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
NRF	National Resistance Front
PDL	Places of Deprivation of Liberty
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on direct interviews with 34 victims of arbitrary detention, ill-treatment and torture by the Taliban and aims to provide a detailed picture of the state of prisons, with particular focus on torture and ill-treatment in Afghanistan.

All 34 respondents faced some form of physical or psychological torture and ill-treatment in different stages of their detention. The report documents the victims' experiences and narratives and provides a deeper understanding of torture patterns in places of deprivation of liberty (PDL) in Afghanistan.

The report aims to raise public awareness, and advocate for protection for survivors and accountability for those responsible for torture and ill-treatment.

Since the Taliban's re-takeover of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, numerous reports have emerged of widespread human rights violations, particularly in detention facilities under their control. In the absence of independent oversight bodies and effective legal deterrents, the Taliban, de facto authorities in Afghanistan (DFA) have arbitrarily and unlawfully detained individuals during this period, subjecting them to torture and ill-treatment.

Torture is not a new phenomenon in Afghanistan, and has a long history across various regimes. This report specifically focuses on treatment of detainees and the inhumane conditions prevalent in detention facilities in Afghanistan since August 2021. Based on the findings of this research, arbitrary detention is a common experience of individuals detained by the Taliban and the use of torture and ill-treatment is prevalent across the PDLs affiliated with various Taliban entities, including the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Ministry of Defence (MoD). Taliban use various methods of torture to extract confessions and information, intimidate, punish, or humiliate detainees. Information obtained from interviewees also indicates that torture has been employed as a tool to suppress protests and suppress dissent, and as a means of retaliation against former government employees, especially opponents and critics of the Taliban.

The survivor testimonies for this report cover information about the Taliban treatment of detainees from the initial stages of arrest until release. Thirty two of the 34 interviewees referenced physical torture in their statements, with several of the women respondents experiencing sexual harassment as well. Respondents have also spoken about their experiences of prolonged solitary confinement and detention in private prisons, deliberate deprivation of health and medical services, denial of access to legal counsel, insufficient food, and other humiliating and inhumane conditions.

In some cases, the Taliban, primarily the employees of the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) have tortured victims for amusement and recreation, and they have continued to harass some survivors after their release.

We hope this report will receive serious attention from the United Nations (UN) member states, governments engaging with the Taliban, International Criminal Court (ICC), relevant United Nations bodies and UN mandates and organizations working to support victims of torture. The findings should pave the way for urgent action to further investigate and address the situation in Taliban-controlled detention centres, prevent the continuation of torture and ill-treatment, and provide effective support to victims.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rawadari compiled this report using a qualitative research approach, focusing on documenting the Taliban's treatment of prisoners, especially cases of torture and ill-treatment.

Rawadari's research team conducted direct interviews with 34 individuals, including 7 women, who faced detention and imprisonment after the Taliban regained power between August 15, 2021, and January 4, 2025.

Rawadari team knew some of the respondents from our previous work on human rights violations and we used a snowball method to expand our initial list of interviewees.

All interviews took place after the respondents' release; 22 of these individuals now live outside Afghanistan. Their detention periods ranged from 2 hours to 3 years.

The interviewees represent a diverse cross-section from 16 provinces¹, encompassing various ethnic, religious, gender, and professional backgrounds, including former government employees, civil activists, journalists, and human rights defenders.

From April 9 to June 3, 2025, a team of Rawadari's researchers conducted these interviews either by phone or in person. We used a consistent, semi-structured questionnaire to document the experience of respondents in various stages, from arrest to release. Interviews were conducted in both Farsi/Dari² and Pashto, each lasting between 1.5–3 hours.

Before each interview, we obtained informed verbal consent from the participants, thoroughly explaining the research objectives, data protection measures, and how we would use their information. To ensure the safety and security of all participants, we keep all collected data, including their identities, strictly confidential and secure.

¹ Bamiyan, Badakhshan, Balkh, Badghis, Parwan, Daikundi, Jawzjan, Ghor, Ghazni, Kandahar, Kapisa, Kabul, Sar-e-pol, Samangan, Maidan Wardak and Herat

² The original language of the report is Dari/Farsi as well and this is a translation.

For data analysis, we employed a qualitative approach, coding and categorizing all interviews based on the questionnaire content and key research themes. Therefore, this report is built on documenting and qualitatively analysing victims' experiences. All the figures included in various sections aim to identify common patterns in these respondents' accounts.

Research Limitations

Given the Taliban's severe restrictions on access to information, particularly their use of violence and intimidation to prevent the disclosure of human rights violations, our primary challenge was limited access to victims and their reluctance to speak about their experiences.

When released from prison, the Taliban forbid victims from speaking to others or providing information. Many victims remain silent, fearing re-arrest and further torture. Additionally, some victims refused to be interviewed due to a deep distrust of accountability mechanisms and human rights organizations. Furthermore, we couldn't access official documents or related evidence for independent verification of our findings. Due to the Taliban's restrictions, human rights organizations cannot currently monitor places of deprivation of liberty in Afghanistan. Despite these significant limitations, this report aims to present a comprehensive and factual picture of human rights abuses, especially torture and ill-treatment by the Taliban, drawn directly from first-hand victim testimonies.

We have intentionally withheld some details, such as dates and locations for some cases, to protect the identities of the victims.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Freedom from torture is an absolute and undeniable right recognized in numerous international human rights documents. In this section, we will first define torture and its elements, then briefly discuss relevant international instruments and Afghanistan's domestic laws.

Definition of Torture

Article 1 of the International Convention Against Torture defines torture as: "Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity³." The Istanbul Protocol further elaborates on the types of pain and suffering, methods, and objectives of torture, offering effective guidance for its identification and documentation⁴.

3 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), (10 December 1984), Article 1.

4 Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2022 edition), Chapter 4, Section B.1

Elements and Conditions for Torture

According to the Convention Against Torture, the crime of torture requires the simultaneous presence of these elements:

- **Material Element:** This involves an intentional act or omission that causes severe physical or mental pain or suffering. It can be direct (e.g., beating, psychological abuse) or a deliberate failure to perform duties (e.g., denying food, medicine, or family contact).
- **Mental Element:** Torture must be premeditated, committed with the specific intent to inflict pain or suffering. Unintentional or accidental acts, even if they cause suffering, do not constitute torture.
- **Perpetrator of Torture:** The act of torture must be carried out directly by a state official or with their consent, instigation, or silent approval. Actions between private individuals without state involvement are not considered torture.
- **Purpose of Torture:** The infliction of physical and mental pain and suffering must be aimed at obtaining information or a confession, or for intimidation, punishment, or based on discrimination.
- **Severity of Pain and Suffering:** Given the previous four elements, an intentional act or omission that causes the most intense physical and mental suffering to the victim is considered torture.

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM FROM TORTURE

International human rights instruments and Afghanistan's domestic laws explicitly guarantee freedom from torture as an inalienable human right.

A. International Human Rights Instruments

Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states unequivocally: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."⁵ Similarly, Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights emphasizes: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."⁶ The International Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, widely considered the most important international document prohibiting torture, forbids torture at all times and without any exceptions. Article 2, paragraph 2, of this Convention asserts: "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."⁷ The Committee Against Torture, as the Convention's monitoring body, has significantly contributed to its interpretation and states' obligations to prevent torture through its general comments and jurisprudence. The Istanbul Protocol also serves as a definitive international guide, helping monitoring bodies identify and document torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

At the same time, under the Statute of the International Criminal Court, torture is an international crime. If committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians, it can even be considered a crime against humanity⁸.

⁵ UNGA, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (10 December 1948), Article 5.

⁶ UNGA, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (16 December 1966), Article 7.

⁷ Convention Against Torture, Paragraph 2, Article 2.

⁸ Rome Statute, International Criminal Court, 17 July 1988, Article 7

B. Domestic Laws

Afghanistan's domestic laws, including the 2004 Constitution, in line with international human rights instruments, absolutely guarantee the right to freedom from torture. Article 29 of this Constitution explicitly states: "Torture of human beings is forbidden. No person may torture or order the torture of another person, even for the purpose of obtaining information, even if the person is under prosecution, arrest, detention or condemnation⁹." Article 30 further clarifies: "Statements, confessions and testimonies obtained from an accused person, or any other person, through coercion, shall have no validity. A confession of guilt is the acknowledgment of the accused, with full consent and in a sound state of mind, in the presence of a competent court."

The Afghan Penal Code, ratified in 2018, within the framework of Article 29 of the Constitution, criminalizes torture by defining its elements and prescribing penalties for its perpetrators¹⁰. Furthermore, Afghanistan's Anti-Torture Law, ratified in 2017, prohibits all government employees from torturing individuals at all stages of judicial prosecution. It emphasizes that under no circumstances, even in times of war or threat of war, internal political instability, or any other emergency, can individuals be subjected to torture or cruel treatment¹¹.

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM FROM TORTURE

However, after seizing power, the Taliban suspended the implementation of these laws, including the Constitution, the Penal Code, and the Anti-Torture Law. Consequently, no effective legal mechanisms currently exist in Afghanistan to prevent torture or prosecute its perpetrators¹².

STATE OBLIGATIONS

Under international human rights instruments, States Parties bear the responsibility to combat torture and ill-treatment. They must uphold human dignity, provide effective protection for victims, and implement necessary laws and regulations. The prohibition of torture is considered a jus cogens norm of international law, meaning states, regardless of their adherence to international instruments, can never resort to torture. However, for member states, fulfilling the following obligations in the fight against torture and ill-treatment is mandatory and undeniable.

A - Criminalization of Torture

According to Article 4 of the International Convention Against Torture, states must explicitly criminalize torture in their domestic laws. They must also define and impose effective, proportionate, and deterrent penalties on perpetrators. Furthermore, Article 2 of this Convention obligates states to take legal, administrative, and judicial measures to ensure torture's absolute prohibition.

Concurrently, Article 14 of the Convention Against Torture stipulates: "Each State Party shall ensure in its legal system that a victim of an act of torture obtains redress and has an enforceable right to fair

9 The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 28 January 2004, Official Gazette 818, Article 29.

10 Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 15 May 2017, Official Gazette 1260, Article 450 and Article 451

11 Anti-torture Law of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2017, Official Gazette, Article 6 and Article 7

12 Rawadari, "Justice Denied: An examination of the legal and judicial system in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan", June 2023. <https://rawadari.org/reports/justice-denied-an-examination-of-the-legal-and-judicial-system-in-taliban-controlled-afghanistan/>

and adequate compensation...'¹³ Additionally, defining the jurisdiction of domestic courts to address torture is another duty of the Member States¹⁴.

B - Executive Measures

States Parties' executive measures include prompt investigation and examination of all torture allegations, and the prosecution and legal punishment of perpetrators. To prevent torture, states should also regularly train prison staff, security forces, and judicial personnel. They must also establish independent national institutions for the regular monitoring of prisons, detention centres, and facilities to identify and prevent torture. Providing psychological, legal, and social services to victims and submitting periodic reports on measures taken to implement the provisions of the Convention Against Torture are among other obligations of States Parties.

Afghanistan has signed numerous international instruments that guarantee the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, including the International Convention Against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁵. Therefore, the Taliban, as the de facto ruling group, must comply with the obligations arising from these documents. This obligation stems not only from Afghanistan's membership in binding international instruments but also from the jus cogens norms of international law. Under this rule, the prohibition of torture is a universal and non-derogable commitment that no governing structure or group can violate.

REPORT FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section delves into the Taliban's treatment of detainees and prisoners, from the moment of arrest to their release, evaluating their actions against international standards, particularly the Convention Against Torture and the Istanbul Protocol. We'll first examine violations during initial detention, then the conditions within facilities, followed by the types of torture and ill-treatment, their physical and psychological repercussions, and finally, the obstacles to achieving justice and accountability for the survivors.

ARBITRARY AND UNLAWFUL DETENTION

Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights clearly states that everyone has the right to liberty and personal security. No one should face arbitrary arrest or detention. Individuals can only lose their freedom under lawful circumstances and through fair legal processes. Even if domestic laws permit detention, it becomes arbitrary and forbidden if it is unjust, unpredictable, disproportionate, or lacks fair trial principles.

However, our findings indicate that the Taliban issued no legal warrants for the arrest of 33 of the 34 interviewees. These arrests occurred without any official documents, stated charges, or adherence to legal requirements and fair trial standards. Only one interviewee knew there was a warrant for their arrest but never saw it.

¹³ Convention Against Torture, Article 14

¹⁴ Convention Against Torture, Article 5

¹⁵ UN Treaty Body Database, Ratification Status for Afghanistan, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=1&Lang=EN

Three interviewees reported being summoned by phone by the GDI before their arrest. Additionally, 15 others detailed how, without due process, they were transported to detention facilities in private vehicles, on motorcycles, and sometimes with black bags over their heads and hands and feet bound, crammed into car trunks. While Taliban security forces carried out these arrests, the officers often wore no official uniforms and did not identify themselves.

Furthermore, 28 out of 34 interviewees never accessed legal counsel at any stage of the judicial process. The cases of 24 individuals, those mostly held by the GDI, never reached a court or any other judicial authority. Of the 34 respondents, 2 of them were in Taliban custody for two hours.

The Taliban detained and tortured these individuals for days, even months, primarily for working with the previous government, protesting the Taliban's discriminatory policies, engaging in civil and advocacy activities, or even for publishing a critical social media post. Of the 34 respondents, the GDI arrested 24, the police i.e the Ministry of Interior (MoI) arrested 6, and Ministry of Defence (MoD)-affiliated forces arrested 2. One respondent was arrested jointly by the GDI and police and one respondent was arrested by the security forces of a district governor.



One victim recounted:

"Around ten in the morning, I was sitting near my house when four armed Taliban in plain clothes and black turbans, on two motorcycles, stopped. After asking my name, one pointed his Kalashnikov at me and forced me onto his motorcycle. Like kidnappers, they immediately tied my hands and feet and took me to a local checkpoint. When we arrived, one said, 'Imprison him in the toilet'¹⁶."

Another interviewee shared:

"Several men in plain clothes came and asked my name. When I answered, they pulled a black bag over my head and took me without a word. We drove for about half an hour to the detention centre. At first, they said nothing and didn't answer my questions. Later, I realized I was imprisoned in a military unit of the Taliban's Ministry of Defence¹⁷."

A third interviewee, arrested solely for a social media post, explained:

"When they arrested me, I didn't know why. Later, they said it was because I posted a condolence message on Facebook for

¹⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.

¹⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 11, 27 April 2025.

those killed opposing the Taliban. I had just written a message of sympathy, nothing more¹⁸.”

Another interviewee described his arrest:

“After praying in the mosque, I was walking home when seven to eight armed men in a Ranger pickup and a dark-windowed Fielder stopped me. All were armed, wearing turbans and local clothes... They showed no arrest warrant. At first, I couldn’t tell which Taliban agency they belonged to, but later I realized that the DGI had arrested me¹⁹.”

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Enforced disappearance means a state’s agents, or groups acting with state approval, arrest, detain, abduct, or otherwise deprive someone of liberty, then deliberately refuse to disclose their whereabouts, fate, or reasons for detention²⁰. Its defining features are secrecy and the denial of legal protection, not a specific duration of absence²¹.

Our information reveals that 10 of 34 interviewees were first forcibly disappeared by the Taliban and then tortured. Five of these cases involved the GDI, three involved Ministry of Interior, one related to the joint Mol and DGI arrest and one was the arrest by the local district governor forces. Victims were arrested without warrants or notice, and their families received no information about their location, fate, or reasons for detention.

The Taliban transferred all these victims with hands and eyes bound, often in private vehicles or on motorcycles, to detention centres. Some, as we will explain, were held in secret prisons.

Our findings show that in some cases, families sought information from Taliban security agencies about their loved ones, but the Taliban deliberately withheld details and denied detaining these individuals.



One interviewee recalled:

“While I was held in a container at a Kandahar police precinct, my family and friends repeatedly visited, asking about me. But the officials denied my presence, saying they had no information and hadn’t arrested me²².”

¹⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 2, 3 June 2025.

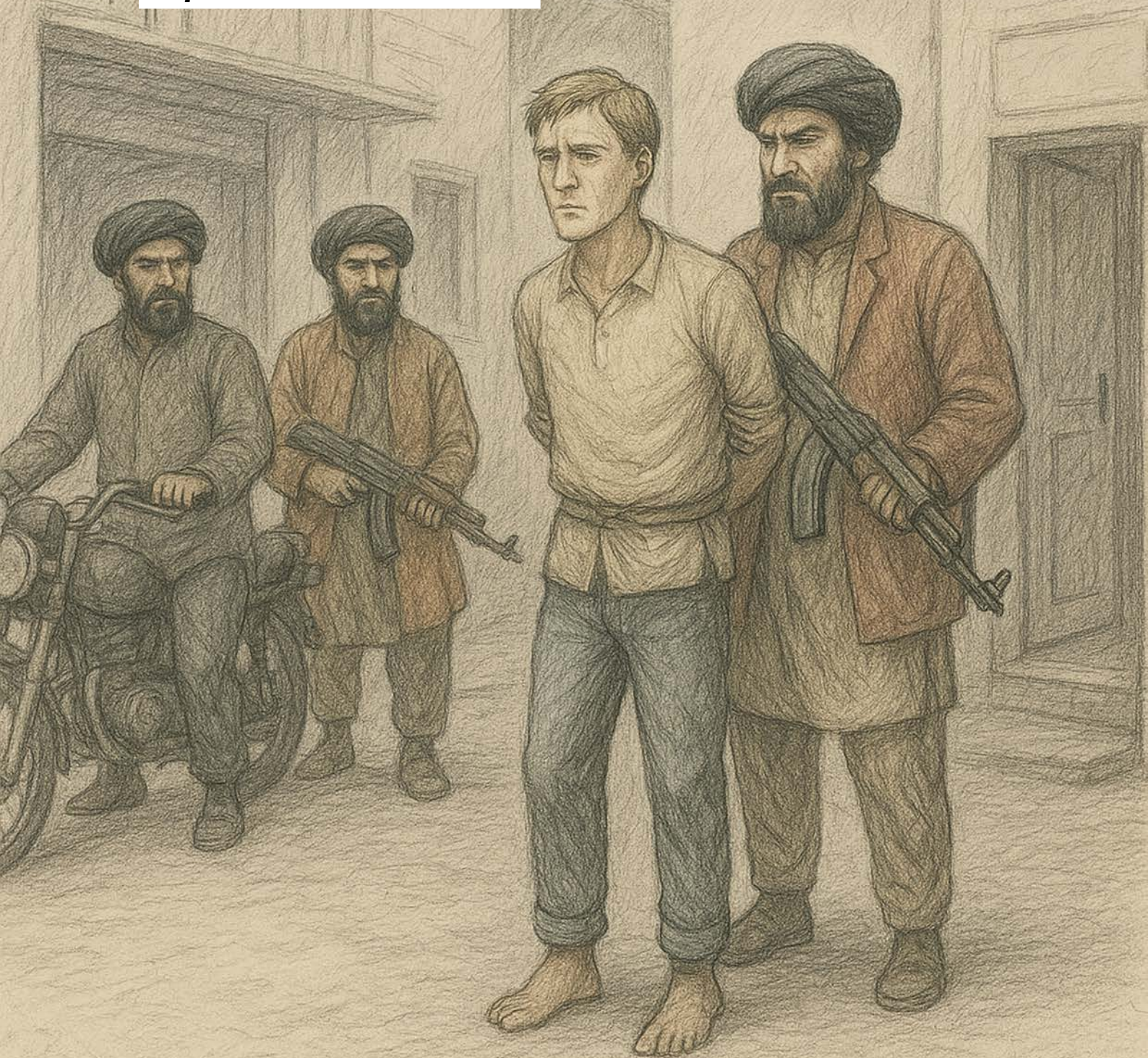
¹⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 13, 9 April 2025.

²⁰ International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, UNGA, 20 December 2006, Resolution 61/177, Article 2

²¹ Human Rights Council, Working Group on Forced or Involuntary Disappearances, General Comments, A/HRC/16/48. January 2011. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/16/48>

²² Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.

"Around ten in the morning, I was sitting near my house when four armed Taliban in plain clothes and black turbans, on two motorcycles, stopped. After asking my name, one pointed his Kalashnikov at me and forced me onto his motorcycle. Like kidnappers, they immediately tied my hands and feet and took me to a local checkpoint. When we arrived, one said, 'Imprison him in the toilet.'"





Similarly, a woman protester, arrested by Taliban intelligence for her civil activism and opposition to the ban on women and girls' education, stated:

"My family visited various Taliban departments several times for information about me, but the Taliban gave them nothing. They told my family, 'Perhaps your daughter ran away with a man, and you don't know.' They said this deliberately to upset my family²³."

Another woman interviewee, arrested for human rights advocacy and supporting women's education, offered a similar account:

"After 21 days, I was in a terrible state. I cried and pleaded to call my family; my parents are ill and don't know where I am. They agreed, and I told my family I was in the intelligence directorate's prison. For those 21 days, my family searched extensively. They filed complaints with intelligence, police, and district headquarters, but officials denied my presence. At the intelligence directorate, they told my family, 'Your daughter might have run away with someone²⁴.'"

In some instances, the Taliban even pressured victims to lie to their families. An interviewee detained by the GDI recounted:

"On the second night, they told me to tell my family I was at work and my phone wasn't working here. I did that, hiding from my family the Taliban had arrested me and I was in prison. My father came from the village to Kabul and tried hard to get information about me. He went to intelligence, police headquarters, and Department 40 (of GDI), but they gave him no information. After 28 days, I could finally contact my family²⁵."

It is important to note that throughout their detention, all these individuals were denied other legal protections, such as access to legal counsel and judicial authorities. Although a significant portion of these detainees were held in official locations, such as the detention facilities of the GDI and police headquarters, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances' general comment indicates that if responsible authorities refuse to provide information about a detainee's fate or whereabouts and deprive them of legal protection, even detention in an official location can constitute enforced disappearance²⁶.

²³ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

²⁴ Rawadari, Interviewee No 32, 24 May 2025.

²⁵ Rawadari, Interviewee No 30, 3 May 2025.

²⁶ Committee on Enforced Disappearances, General Comment 1, Adoption on 18 September 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/ced/general-comments>

MOTIVES FOR ARBITRARY DETENTION AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Our findings illustrate that victims of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance primarily belonged to three groups: human rights defenders, former government employees, and individuals accused of membership in anti-Taliban groups. The DFA, specially the GDI, targeted these individuals with repressive tactics and as political retaliation.

Suppression of Civic Activism

Victim testimonies reveal that suppressing freedom of expression and civic activism such as promoting girls' education has been a key motivation for the Taliban to detain, forcibly disappear, and torture human rights defenders, including protesting women, journalists, and education activists. The GDI, aiming to instil fear and stifle free speech, first unlawfully arrests individuals, then subjects them to the most severe forms of torture. The 2024 Human Rights Watch report corroborates this, stating that the Taliban restrict media and freedom of expression, arbitrarily detaining and disappearing journalists and critics²⁷.

Among our interviewees, some were detained for criticizing the Taliban's discriminatory policies on social media and then brutally tortured for days or even months. Victims' direct accounts also show that the Taliban arrested and tortured protesting women and other human rights defenders who advocated against discriminatory policies, like the ban on women's education. Thus, arbitrary and unlawful detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture served as tools to silence dissent and prevent civil engagement.

The Taliban consistently detain these individuals under accusations like spying for other countries and receiving money for protests, then subject them to torture, as we'll detail later.



A human rights defender, tortured after criticizing the closure of girls' schools on Facebook, recounted:

"I asked what my crime was. The commander said I'd committed many: spying for Americans, foreigners, and infidels, sending them reports, stopping youth from jihad, encouraging girls to get educated so they'd become prostitutes, and working for 'infidel' human rights and democracy"²⁸..."

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025, Page 12, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025>

²⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025



Another interviewee, who suffered various forms of torture after arrest, shared:

“When I explained that both men and women should study, and that education is the right of all Afghans, he slapped me and said, ‘You evil person, you talk about rights? Girls should stay home, otherwise they become prostitutes. Are there not enough prostitutes in Kabul that you’re increasing their numbers? He said, ‘You and those who protest against the Islamic Emirate get money from foreigners²⁹.’”

Our report’s findings reveal that while detaining and torturing human rights defenders, the Taliban also tried and punished some individuals on charges like causing “moral corrupting on earth³⁰,” (a “religious” charge), “national treason,” “insulting the Mujahideen,” “rebellion against the ruler” and “encouraging women to protest.”

Political Retaliation

Political retaliation stands out as another key motive behind this wave of arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances, as indicted by victims’ testimonies. Thus, the second group of victims were former government employees and individuals accused of ties to armed anti-Taliban groups, all targeted by the Taliban’s arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances. Amnesty International’s annual report confirmed that the Taliban continued arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and other abuses against former government staff, human rights defenders, and critics³¹. Similarly, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported at least 23 arbitrary detentions of former government security forces between January 1 and March 31, 2025³².



A former military officer, who returned to Kabul under the Taliban’s general amnesty, was identified and arrested by the GDI. He shares this:

“I had gone to my village to visit friends and relatives. As I was returning to Kabul, several armed Taliban on motorcycles swiftly passed our car, and I felt scared. So I went to a relative’s house. When I was heading back to Kabul, a Taliban intelligence agent who knew me saw me. In a deserted area, near a pass, six armed Taliban on three motorcycles ordered my car to stop. In front of my family, they forcibly pulled me out and took me with them...³³”

²⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025

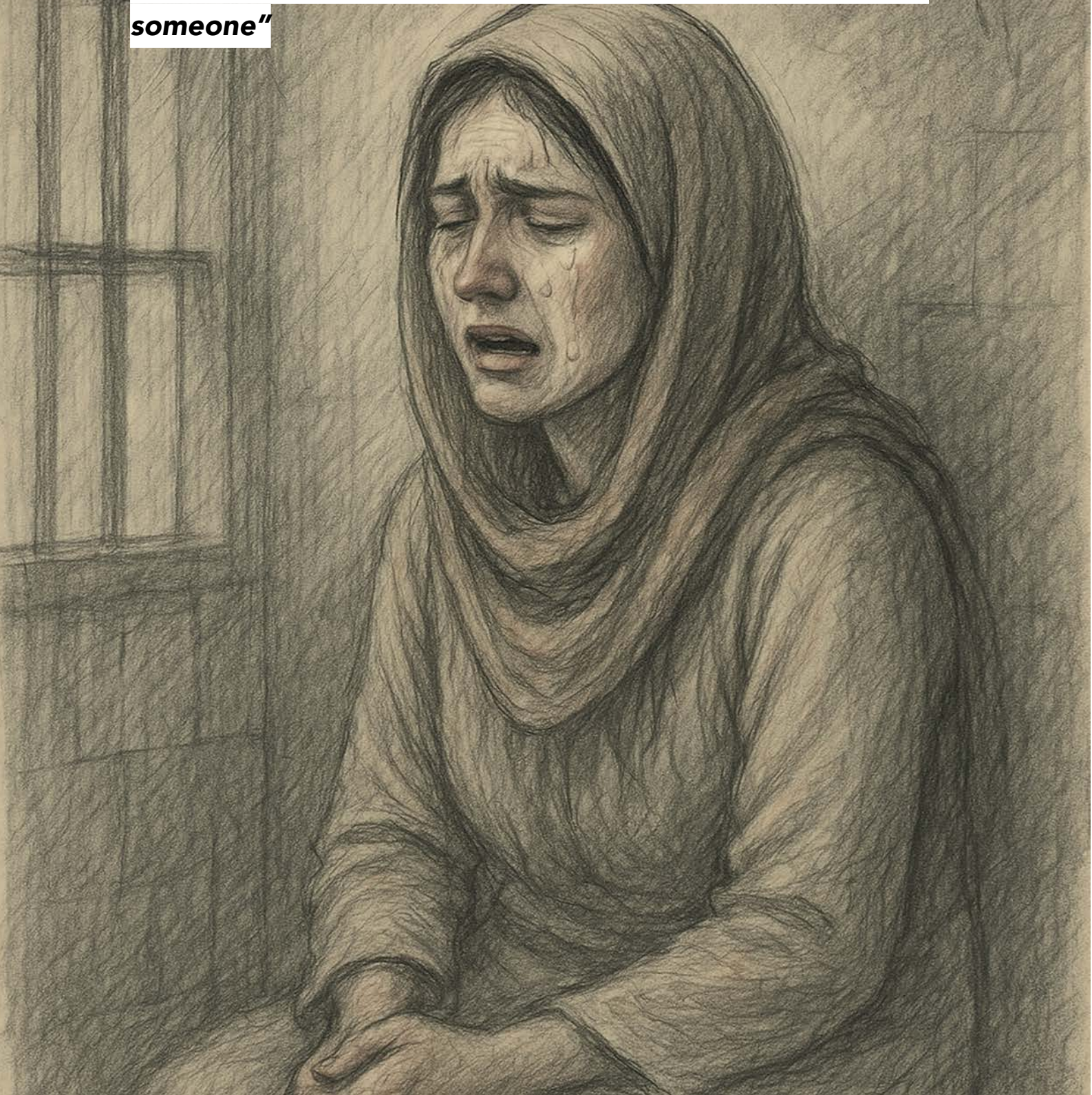
³⁰ Causing “Fisad felarz” roughly translates to spreading corruption on earth (alternatively being mufsid felarz means being the cause for corruption) and refers to actions that cause harm to public security, calm and justice. It is a religious term that seems to be used as a criminal charge by the Taliban.

³¹ Amnesty International, The State of the World’s Human Rights: April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/8515/2025/en/>

³² UNAMA, Update on the Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: January-March 2025 Update. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_update_on_human_rights_in_afghanistan_january-march_2025.pdf

³³ Rawadari, Interviewee No 23, 18 April 2025

"After 21 days, I was in a terrible state. I cried and pleaded to call my family; my parents are ill and don't know where I am. They agreed, and I told my family I was in the intelligence directorate's prison. For those 21 days, my family searched extensively. They filed complaints with intelligence, police, and district headquarters, but officials denied my presence. At the intelligence directorate, they told my family, 'Your daughter might have run away with someone'"





Information from victim interviews reveals that the Taliban often arrested and harassed former government employees on various pretexts, including possessing weapons. As one tortured interviewee stated:

“One day, the GDI staff came to my house and said someone had filed a complaint against me and I had to go with them. They handcuffed me and took me. Later, they asked, ‘Where is your weapon? How many years did you work for the previous government, and how many Taliban members did you kill?’”³⁴

Our findings indicate that arbitrary and unlawful detentions, along with enforced disappearances, provided the Taliban with an opportunity for widespread abuses, including various forms of torture and ill-treatment, which we will now detail elaborating on each stage of detention.

USE OF FORCE AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR IN INITIAL DETENTION

According to Article 10, paragraph 1, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, all individuals deprived of their liberty must be treated with humanity and respect for their inherent dignity. This provision governs all aspects of how detainees are treated and prohibits any unnecessary use of force.

Our findings illustrate that 31 out of 34 interviewees experienced beatings or verbal abuse, including ethnic, religious, or gender-based insults by the Taliban during their arrest and transfer to the places of detention. Our findings specifically indicate that arrests conducted by the GDI were particularly violent and involved severe physical and psychological ill-treatment. Out of the 24 individuals arrested by the GDI, 23 faced severe physical and psychological abuse during the arrest and transfer stage.

Our findings also highlight that violence and ill-treatment were often used to intimidate and punish victims.



One victim recounted:

“They forcibly took my phone. When I didn’t give them the password, they slapped my face several times hard. I was terrified and couldn’t speak. They forced me into the car, tied my hands behind my back, and threw a black bag over my head. One Taliban member sat on my right, another on my left, and while forcibly holding my head down, they hit both my sides. I was very scared... I was screaming and crying³⁵.”

³⁴ Rawadari, Interviewee No 16, 4 May 2025

³⁵ Rawadari, Interviewee No 8, 15 April 2025



Another victim, subjected to violence and ill-treatment during arrest by GDI, stated:

“I was on my way to holding and participating in a protest when the Taliban followed me. Several armed men attacked me, slapping me so hard I fell. They cursed me, grabbed my arm, and pulled me up. I resisted and screamed. They covered my mouth tightly and threw me into a Ranger car, then tied my hands and threw a blanket over my head. Then they hit my neck hard with their rifle butt, leaving me dazed for a few minutes. I felt my ears were blocked³⁶.”

Similarly, another interviewee described his arrest experience:

“Four armed Taliban in military uniforms arrested me. After asking my name, they immediately handcuffed me and forcibly led me out. When we reached at the intelligence facility, they had lost the handcuff key, realizing they had left it at the arrest site. Then one said they wanted to shoot the handcuff open. I begged them not to. Finally, they opened it with a saw, leaving the broken cuff on one hand and the intact one on the other, and imprisoned me in a room³⁷.”

Another victim's account reveals the Taliban's disproportionate use of violence during his arrest:

“When I was returning home, armed men attacked me. I ran, and they shot me in the leg. Then they put the rifle barrel in my mouth and said, ‘Tell me where your other friends are, or I’ll shoot.’ For about 40 minutes, while they gathered their men, I was bleeding. They took my handkerchief and tied my leg to stop the bleeding³⁸.”

Furthermore, interviewees reported facing verbal abuse and violence from the Taliban during arrest and transfer. The Taliban frequently used terms like “infidel, apostate, traitor, rebel, vicious, animal, American slave, Western slave, prostitute, and whore” to demean and insult them.

³⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025

³⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 7, 27 April 2025

³⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 31, 25 May 2025



One victim recounted:

“Late at night, they surrounded my house and violently arrested me. The car started, and on the way, they cursed me, saying, ‘You infidel rebel, how dare you stand against the Emirate?’ They used terrible language, my eyes were covered, and my hands were cuffed behind my back. When we reached the intelligence directorate, one said, ‘Throw this animal in the toilet, we’ll execute him tomorrow’³⁹.”

Another victim, who endured verbal abuse during arrest by Taliban forces, stated:

“After transfer to the intelligence directorate, my eyes were blindfolded. The Taliban spoke among themselves, saying, ‘We brought the corrupt one, we brought the infidel,’ and they said whatever that came to their mouth⁴⁰.”

Another interviewee shared an experience of the Taliban’s physical and verbal abuse:

“...When they arrested me, they beat me and cursed me terribly, using ethnic, religious, and sexual insults that are even distressing for me to repeat⁴¹.”

The Taliban’s behaviour during initial detention, as highlighted in victims’ direct accounts, constitutes ill-treatment, inhuman, and degrading treatment. Some of these actions, given the severity of injuries and their motives, also possessed elements of torture, which we have detailed in the section on torture and ill-treatment.

CONFISCATION OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

According to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules), authorities must return all personal property taken from a prisoner upon release, unless legally confiscated. An inventory of these items should also be provided to the prisoner⁴².

In interviews with Rawadari, 9 out of 34 interviewees stated that the Taliban never returned their confiscated personal belongings after release. These items included cars, cash, earrings, watches, rings, laptops, mobile phones, handbags, and clothes, all seized at the time of arrest.

³⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025

⁴⁰ Rawadari, Interviewee No 5, 27 April 2025.

⁴¹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

⁴² The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), 17 December 2015, https://www.unodc.org/documents/jus-tice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf



One interviewee recalled:

“They confiscated two mobile phones, 400 dollars, and a camera, and despite my efforts, they never returned them. They also took several laptops and other equipment from our organization⁴³.”

Another interviewee stated:

“On the day of my release, they only returned my mobile phone, which they had installed a few apps on. They didn’t return my clothes, shoes, or watch. While I was in prison, I even saw the monitoring facility’s cook wearing my jumper⁴⁴.”

Similarly, another interviewee described the non-return of her confiscated personal belongings:

“When they took me to the monitoring facility, they took my handbag, some cash, earrings, my watch, and my ring, and never gave them back⁴⁵.”

As victims’ accounts show, the confiscation of personal property without return is a common form of ill-treatment and a violation of prisoners’ legal rights in Taliban prisons.

DETENTION AND PRISON⁴⁶ CONDITIONS

This section examines and analyses the conditions in detention facilities, including the types of places where individuals are deprived of liberty, access to basic human and sanitary facilities, access to sufficient food and clean water, and access to health and medical services.

1. Type of Detention Facilities

Our report’s findings show that of the 34 interviewees, 22 were held in GDI monitoring centres (nezarat khana) or other GDI facilities, 6 in police detention facilities, 2 were held in Ministry of Defence (MoD) facilities, and 3 in unofficial or private prisons. One person was arrested and tortured by the GDI and then released, prior to transfer to a place of detention. Among these, 21 individuals spent varying periods in solitary confinement cells, completely lacking basic amenities. Additionally, 8 interviewees stated that after being sentenced by Taliban courts, they were transferred to general prisons and completed their sentences there.

⁴³ Rawadari, Interviewee No 30, 3 May 2025.

⁴⁴ Rawadari, Interviewee No 22, 23 April 2025.

⁴⁵ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 27 April 2025.

⁴⁶ Based on article 3 of the Afghan national Law on Prisons, prison refers to nezarat khana (monitoring facility), tawqif khana (detention facility), juvenile reform and reform centres and mahbas (prison). Monitoring facility is where the suspect is kept in initial investigation phase, in accordance with law. Detention facility is where the accused is kept based on prosecutor’s or court’s orders. Prison is where the convicted is detained based on the court’s order for carrying out her/his sentence.

Some interviewees described their detention locations as places such as kindergartens, district administration buildings, containers, basements, toilets, police stations, and intelligence headquarters in provincial centres and districts.



One interviewee shared:

"I asked, 'Why have you arrested me ? What's my crime?' They said, 'You'll find out,' and ordered their armed men to imprison me in a red container within the precinct yard. It had no facilities whatsoever, no carpet or mattress, and the air inside was freezing cold⁴⁷."

Similarly, another interviewee, arrested by the GDI, recounted:

"I was imprisoned in a cold, damp basement of the intelligence detention facility. There were some batteries and a tire-less motorcycle in one corner. The basement had no carpet, and they only gave me a thin blanket⁴⁸."

Another victim, held by the Taliban in inhumane conditions, stated:

"My eyes were blindfolded, and my hands were cuffed behind my back. One of them said, 'Throw this animal in the toilet; we'll execute him tomorrow.' They took me to a room that smelled terrible, and I stayed awake until morning. My hands and eyes remained tied throughout the night. The next day, they moved me to another room for interrogation."⁴⁹

Furthermore, one interviewee detained by the GDI provided this information:

"I was in detention for four hours, but I didn't know where I was because they kept a black bag over my head the whole time. Sometimes, I touched the walls and floor with my tied hands; they were tiled. I don't know anything else about my location of my detention⁵⁰."

⁴⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025

⁴⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 15, 27 April 2025

⁴⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025

⁵⁰ Rawadari, Interviewee No 16, 4 May 2025

As noted earlier, a significant number of interviewees reported being held in solitary confinement or private prisons for varying periods, under inhumane conditions. This situation can constitute elements of torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. Therefore, we will present these cases in detail in the section on torture and ill-treatment, drawing directly from victim testimonies.

2. Lack of Basic Facilities and Personal Hygiene

According to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, detention centres must provide adequate and necessary sanitary facilities. Additionally, Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights mandates that all individuals deprived of liberty must be treated with humanity and respect for their inherent dignity.

Based on information from interviewees, many detention facilities lacked even the most basic human amenities for cleanliness, sleeping, washing, and personal hygiene. Interviewees also reported a lack of proper ventilation and lighting.



One interviewee stated:

“There was nothing but an old, dirty carpet and mattress. We slept sitting, leaning against the wall. The room was so dark we couldn’t tell day from night⁵¹.”

Additionally, another interviewee recounted the absence of essential and basic facilities in prison:

“During my two months in prison, I never saw the sun for a single day. They didn’t allow showering or washing clothes. They gave us unwashed clothes from other prisoners to wear. My body and the bodies of other prisoners were infected due to lack of hygiene⁵².”

Victims’ narratives and information reveal that throughout their detention, they were held in environments lacking basic human amenities and hygiene, which can be considered inhuman or degrading treatment and a violation of human dignity.

3. Lack of Access to Adequate Food and Clean Drinking Water

The Mandela Rules emphasize the provision of adequate food and clean drinking water for all inmates. Depriving prisoners of these rights not only endangers their lives but can also constitute ill-treatment and a violation of their human dignity.

Our findings illustrate that 28 out of 34 interviewees lacked proper and sufficient food and clean drinking water during their detention, especially in the GDI and police detention facilities. Some

⁵¹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 34, 20 April 2025

⁵² Rawadari, Interviewee No 22, 23 April 2025

reported receiving only dry bread and water during this time.

Others stated they occasionally received meals like beans, chickpeas, potato stew, eggs, okra, and on some nights, rice and stew. Additionally, several interviewees mentioned receiving dry bread and water only twice every 24 hours, while others emphasized that they went to bed hungry.



One interviewee recalled:

“Sometimes every other day, sometimes every two days, they gave us a bottle of mineral water and a piece of cold, stale dry bread. They put the bread on the very dirty floor⁵³.”

Another interviewee offered a similar account:

“Twice every 24 hours, they brought a piece of bread with a bowl of dirty water that was absolutely undrinkable. It was as if they were bringing food for a dog or an animal. I couldn’t even swallow a single bite of that bread; honestly, I had no appetite, nor was I in a state to even think about hunger. I was in such a state that I had completely forgotten about eating⁵⁴.”

Furthermore, another interviewee provided details about his nutrition:

“The quality of food and water was extremely poor, and hygiene was completely disregarded. Bread and tea, potato stew, and okra were the main foods we received. However, some nights, merchants and philanthropists from the city would send charitable food to the prison, usually rice and stew⁵⁵.”

Another interviewee spoke about the unhygienic food:

“The food situation was terrible. The water was undrinkable, and one day we’d find stones in the food, the next, snuff (tobacco)⁵⁶.”

4. Lack of Access to Healthcare Services

According to Principles 24 and 25 of the Nelson Mandela Rules, all prisoners must receive healthcare without discrimination, and medical services within prisons must be equivalent to those available in the community. Therefore, deliberately depriving detainees of healthcare services can be considered inhuman or degrading treatment.

⁵³ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025

⁵⁴ Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.

⁵⁵ Rawadari, Interviewee No 24, 26 April 2025.

⁵⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 32, 24 May 2025.

Our findings illustrate that out of 34 interviewees, only one received a medical examination due to injuries sustained during detention. None of the other detainees were examined by a doctor upon their admission to prison facilities. Furthermore, 27 out of 34 individuals reported no access to healthcare during their detention.



One interviewee recounted:

“There was no medicine or treatment. Any wound you got had to either dry up on its own or get infected. I had a fever many times. I just wanted to die and be free⁵⁷.”

Another interviewee stated:

“On the third night of detention, my leg was bleeding because they had tied it tightly to discarded batteries in the corner of the cell. There was no first aid, and they tied my leg with a scarf to stop the bleeding⁵⁸.”

Another interviewee described the healthcare situation:

“I met a doctor once in the detention facility, who looked like a mullah. When I explained my problems, he said, ‘May God heal you,’ offering no further help. But after my transfer to the general prison, Red Cross doctors sometimes came and provided some basic assistance⁵⁹.”

5. Lack of Women’s Access to Sanitary Products

Among the seven detained women interviewed, four stated they needed sanitary products and specialized healthcare during their detention but could not access it.



One interviewee recounted:

“During my detention, I had my period, and my clothes were soaked because they kept pouring cold water on me. I was in a room with a camera above me. I had severe pain and I knocked the door repeatedly, explaining I was on my period and in pain, asking for at least a painkiller. They asked, ‘What is a period?’ I said, ‘It’s my monthly cycle, a female problem.’ But they paid no attention⁶⁰.”

⁵⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 9, 12 May 2025

⁵⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 16, 4 May 2025.

⁵⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 5, 27 April 2025.

⁶⁰ Rawadari, Interviewee No 8, 15 April 2025.



Another interviewee said:

“During our detention, most of us women started our periods due to intense fear and psychological pressure, but there were no sanitary products. We used pieces of fabric from the dirty mattresses that were in the room⁶¹.”

Furthermore, another woman interviewee described her detention experience:

“It’s very hard for me to explain that situation. Due to severe torture and beatings, I had back pain and my period, and I needed sanitary pads. I told several of them I needed sanitary pads and medicine. They either truly didn’t understand or wanted me to explain more about what a monthly cycle was. Finally, I shared my problem with the interrogator, who seemed more aware. Three days later, they brought me sanitary pads and said, ‘The law doesn’t allow us to give medicine to prisoners⁶².’”

TYPES OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

In the first chapter, we defined torture and its conditions according to the International Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Now, within that same legal framework, we will examine documented instances of torture and ill-treatment in places of deprivation of liberty, gathered from victim interviews.

Our findings indicate that all 34 interviewees experienced ill-treatment and/or various forms of physical and psychological torture, including in some cases sexual harassment, either during their initial arrest or subsequent interrogations.

Perpetrators intentionally inflicted torture to extract information or confessions, or to intimidate and humiliate victims. Such actions, under international instruments, particularly Article 1 of the Convention Against Torture, clearly constitute torture and blatant human rights violations.

The torture, as noted in the first section, began at the moment of arrest and intensified during interrogation. Victim testimonies reveal that the Taliban have engaged in widespread and systematic torture. Human rights defenders, women protesters, former government employees, and individuals accused of association with armed anti-Taliban groups are among our interviewees. Additionally, two interviewees were arrested and tortured by the GDI on charges of murder and selling alcoholic beverages.

In some cases, victims endured severe torture only to be later found mistakenly arrested or acquitted

⁶¹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 25, 20 April 2025.

⁶² Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

by the DFA courts. Interviewees also stated that interrogations and torture usually occurred at night. In most cases, torturers either wore masks or blindfolded victims to conceal their identities.

UNAMA reported 1600 human rights violations related to detention and custody by the Taliban from January 1 to July 31, 2023. Nearly 50% of these violations involved torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment⁶³. Amnesty International's annual report also stated that in 2024, the Taliban continued to torture and ill-treat former government employees, human rights defenders, journalists, and critics⁶⁴.

A. Physical Torture

Under Article 1 of the International Convention Against Torture, any act causing severe physical harm to a victim is defined as physical torture. This harm can also indirectly affect the victim's family and relatives. The Istanbul Protocol, a comprehensive guide for investigating and documenting torture, categorizes methods like beatings, suspension, electric shocks, waterboarding, nail and tooth extraction, amputation, burning, and severe physical deprivation as clear examples of physical torture. Our findings indicate that 32 out of 34 interviewees experienced various forms of physical torture after their arrest. The Taliban used methods such as beatings, flogging, hanging from the ceiling, waterboarding, putting plastic bags over heads, drilling holes in feet, pulling out nails and teeth, electric shocks, and chapeh walchak (reverse handcuffing) to extract confessions, information, or to threaten and intimidate victims.

Among the reported physical tortures, 22 individuals were tortured in GDI facilities, 4 in police detention facilities, and 2 by forces affiliated with the Taliban's Ministry of Defence. 1 individual was arrested and tortured by GDI and subsequently released before transfer to a place of detention. Three other individuals were tortured by the police, GDI or other local Taliban authorities in private prisons. We will now examine the scope and nature of physical torture methods based on victim testimonies. It's important to note that the Taliban often tortured victims using several of these methods simultaneously.

1 - Beatings

Our data indicates that 32 victims reported being beaten with fists, kicks, rifle butts, wooden sticks, whips, chains, water hoses/pipes, ropes, locks, and cables in sensitive body areas like the head, neck, face, back, hands, and feet during detention and interrogation.

The Taliban primarily beat victims in open spaces, interrogation rooms, and their cells, often with their hands and feet bound. They carried out these actions deliberately to force confessions, extract information, or to threaten and punish.

63 UNAMA, "The Treatment of Detainees in Afghanistan. Respecting Human Rights: A factor for trust", 20 September 2023. <https://unama.unmissions.org/unama-urges-urgent-accelerated-action-afghanistan-s-de-facto-authorities-stop-torture-and-protect>

64 Amnesty International, The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/8515/2025/en/>

"It's very hard for me to explain that situation. Due to severe torture and beatings, I had back pain and my period, and I needed sanitary pads. I told several of them I needed sanitary pads and medicine. They either truly didn't understand or wanted me to explain more about what a monthly cycle was. Finally, I shared my problem with the interrogator, who seemed more aware. Three days later, they brought me sanitary pads and said, 'The law doesn't allow us to give medicine to prisoners'"





One interviewee provided a disturbing account that clearly illustrates the violent nature of the Taliban's behaviour:

"They would strip me naked, pour water on my body, one person would sit on my legs, and another would hold my head tightly. They would beat me so severely I would beg, 'God, just death, I want death every moment.' Sometimes they would take off my clothes and hit my back with a chain tipped with thorns that would tear my skin. Each blow would cause blood to gush, and I'd lose consciousness. Three or four times when I resisted, they tortured me with that same chain⁶⁵."

In some cases, beating detainees to force information and confessions, intimidate, and punish involved methods that simultaneously inflicted severe physical and psychological pain:

"They took me into a forest, an open area. One asked, 'Who has a knife?' I thought they wanted to behead me. I said I needed to use the restroom, and they agreed... After I returned, they tied my hands, which were already tied in front, behind my back with rope. They threw me to the ground, covered my mouth with a cloth, and tied my feet. They lifted my legs, poured water on me, and beat me with a stick. A few minutes later, they said my legs were numb and continued to beat my thighs⁶⁶."

Another victim recounted:

"For four nights, in a dark room, they poured cold water on me, and while my hands were tied, they threw me to the ground and tortured me. One person held my head and shoulders, another my feet. The third hit my waist, buttocks, and thighs with a rubber whip made from a car tire. Sometimes I would lose consciousness from the pain.... Another time, the head of the intelligence directorate came to see me. He demanded I confess and give them information. When I said I had nothing to confess, they took me to the intelligence facility courtyard and severely beat me with a whip that had a sharp metal tip. My body was covered in blood."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.

⁶⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 33, 17 April 2025.

⁶⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 24, 26 April 2025.

As mentioned earlier, most victims suffered torture from the moment of arrest, aimed at obtaining information, intimidation, or punishment.



One victim stated:

"...I was arrested from my home. 40 to 50 armed men with several vehicles arrived. Many rushed me and began beating me. They hit every part of my body with fists, kicks, and rifle butts. A powerful blow from a rifle butt broke my kneecap. After that, I remember nothing and was unconscious for a while. When I regained consciousness, I felt severe pain in my face, chest, and legs⁶⁸."

Victim accounts show that the Taliban's intelligence directorate inflicted the most severe torture on protesters, critics, and former government employees.



A female protester, arrested and tortured for participating in an advocacy program, recounted:

"They beat and tortured me with whatever they had. My eardrum burst, and my right finger was severely injured when they tried to hit my head with a Kalashnikov barrel. Now, I can't sit for long because my leg and back hurt... My forehead and part of my head were also injured by their rifle barrels and kicks⁶⁹."

Similarly, a woman protester stated:

"When I said I wasn't a spy and had protested for my rights, they started beating me. They handcuffed my hands, repeatedly poured cold water on me, and beat me until I lost consciousness. I saw no mercy in them. Each time, they kicked my stomach so hard I passed out. They never considered that these blows could kill me⁷⁰."

68 Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.

69 Rawadari, Interviewee No 26, 25 April 2025.

70 Rawadari, Interviewee No 8, 15 April 2025.



A former government employee's experience reveals other dimensions of the torture inflicted by the Taliban:

"They threw me to the ground and beat me with rifle butts, fists, and kicks. One said we should shoot him in the head and kill him here. The second disagreed, saying the sound of gunfire would expose us. The third said we'd beat him to death like a dog, and at that moment, he delivered a severe blow to my head, and I lost consciousness, not knowing what happened next⁷¹."

Furthermore, another victim, tortured on suspicion of ties to the National Resistance Front (NRF), stated:

"My eyes were blindfolded, and my hands were chained. Two people hit me with a cable from both sides, on my legs, back, and shoulders. They said, 'Confess you had ties to the Resistance Front.' I said I had no cooperation, what could I say when there was nothing? They didn't care and didn't want the truth⁷²."

Similarly, the testimonies indicate that the Taliban severely beat and tortured even those arrested for simple criticism:

"He ordered his armed men to tie my legs and hands. They crossed one leg over the other and bound them. They tied my hands behind my back with a cloth and my mouth with a turban. Then, they started beating me with a cable. He told me, 'Whenever you're ready to confess, move your hand.' They kept beating me, then removed the turban from my mouth and asked, 'Do you confess?' I pleaded and swore my innocence, saying I had no connections to anyone⁷³."

The following is an account from another victim, tortured by the Taliban for working with foreign forces:

"They took me to an underground room. There was no carpet or chair, so they made me sit on the floor. They asked why I worked with Americans and infidels and why I implemented their projects. Then they threw me to the ground and beat my hands, legs, and entire body with a wooden stick that had iron

71 Rawadari, Interviewee No 23, 18 April 2025.

72 Rawadari, Interviewee No 9, 12 May 2025.

73 Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.

inside it. They beat me so severely that I lost consciousness. It was three or four in the morning when I regained consciousness and realized I was still lying face down. My head, body, and especially my legs hurt a lot. My left leg was fractured, and I still suffer from the pain⁷⁴."

2 - Waterboarding

According to interviewees, another common torture method in prisons is waterboarding, used to extract confessions or punish victims. In this method, torturers first cover the victim's mouth with a cloth or plastic bag, then repeatedly pour water on their face to create a severe sensation of suffocation. This method, given its nature, severity, and physical and psychological consequences, constitutes another form of torture and a clear violation of the International Convention Against Torture.

Six individuals among the interviewees stated that they were waterboarded in addition to enduring other forms of torture. A human rights activist, who endured several forms of torture in Taliban prisons, recounted:

"One day, they took me and another person into the detention centre courtyard. There was a large marble stone, about 40 to 50 kilograms. They placed it on our stomachs and put a water pipe in our mouths. They used the stone to prevent water from entering our lungs, otherwise we would die... There were seven or eight torturers, some sitting on my legs, others holding my hands and shoulders tightly. Every minute or so, they would pour water into my mouth, then pause and repeat it⁷⁵."



Similarly, another victim, whom the Taliban tortured for a confession, shared another harrowing account:

"...Then they put a black turban over my mouth and poured water over it. I couldn't breathe and felt like I was drowning. Water went into my stomach until I lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, they said, 'Confess, or you will be killed.' I pleaded and begged, but they refused and tortured me several more times with this method, each time causing me to lose consciousness⁷⁶."

Another interviewee highlighted other brutal aspects of this torture method:

"They removed the cloth from my mouth and asked, 'Where and from whom do you receive orders, and who supports you?'"

⁷⁴ Rawadari, Interviewee No 13, 9 April 2025.

⁷⁵ Rawadari, Interviewee No 5, 27 April 2025.

⁷⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.



How many weapons do you have? Why did you write critical posts against us on social media?’ They threw me back to the ground and covered my face with a cloth. One of the torturers sat on my legs and continuously poured water over the cloth covering my face, sometimes also pouring soft dirt from under my feet onto the cloth, which went into my throat. They would stop the torture just as I was about to suffocate⁷⁷.’

3 - Tooth and Nail Extraction

Our information indicates that the Taliban intelligence, in some cases, used even more brutal torture methods, like pulling out victims’ nails and teeth, to extract confessions, information, or for punishment. Two interviewees stated they were tortured this way during interrogation, and a third reported two broken teeth as a result of torture.



A former security force member, tortured in various ways by the Taliban, recounted a painful experience:

“...Another time, they pulled out my nails one by one. I screamed, not knowing if it was from pain or humiliation. I pleaded, swearing to God I was innocent. But it was useless; the torturers enjoyed it. One of them laughed loudly every time I screamed⁷⁸.’

Another victim, tortured for three months by the GDI on suspicion of murder and later acquitted by the court, highlights a different, painful aspect of the Taliban’s torturous behaviour:

“Inside the intelligence detention centre, they tortured me with rubber ropes and motorcycle chains, and gave me electric shocks. One night, they even pulled out two of my teeth with pliers. I wished they had killed me, it would have been easier. I even told them, ‘Don’t torture me like this, kill me.’ Now I can’t work; my teeth are broken, and my hair has turned white. Believe me, I still can’t sleep at night⁷⁹.’

Furthermore, a human rights activist, arrested and tortured by the Taliban for supporting women’s right to education, stated that the Taliban broke two of his teeth with severe torture:

⁷⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 33, 17 April 2025.

⁷⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 9, 12 May 2025.

⁷⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 19, 1 May 2025.



“One of my teeth broke under torture. They took me, bleeding, to another room. A little later, a Taliban member came and brought a glass of water. It was almost evening when another Taliban member gave me a painkiller. My whole body ached. When night fell, they brought some cold food and handcuffed my hands behind my back, which increased my pain, and I couldn’t sleep until morning... They took me to the interrogation room again and tortured me. This time, my second tooth completely broke⁸⁰.”

4 - Placing Plastic Bags over Victims’ Heads

Six of interviewees reported that Taliban GDI employees, placed plastic bags over their heads and blocked their airways during interrogation. This torture method often accompanied other physical or psychological forms, inflicting severe pain and suffering to extract confessions, information, or for intimidation and punishment—all key elements of torture.



The horrifying consequences and impact of this torture method are powerfully conveyed in the account of a victim arrested for civil society activism:

“The police chief said, ‘This savage spy won’t confess, he must be killed.’ He told another Taliban member to bring a plastic bag. They put the bag over my head and tied it. I couldn’t breathe, I screamed, but my voice wouldn’t come out until I lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, no matter how much I cried and pleaded innocence, they wouldn’t accept it. They tortured me several more times with this method. When they took me back to the container, blood was coming from my throat, and I couldn’t speak⁸¹.”

Similarly, another victim stated:

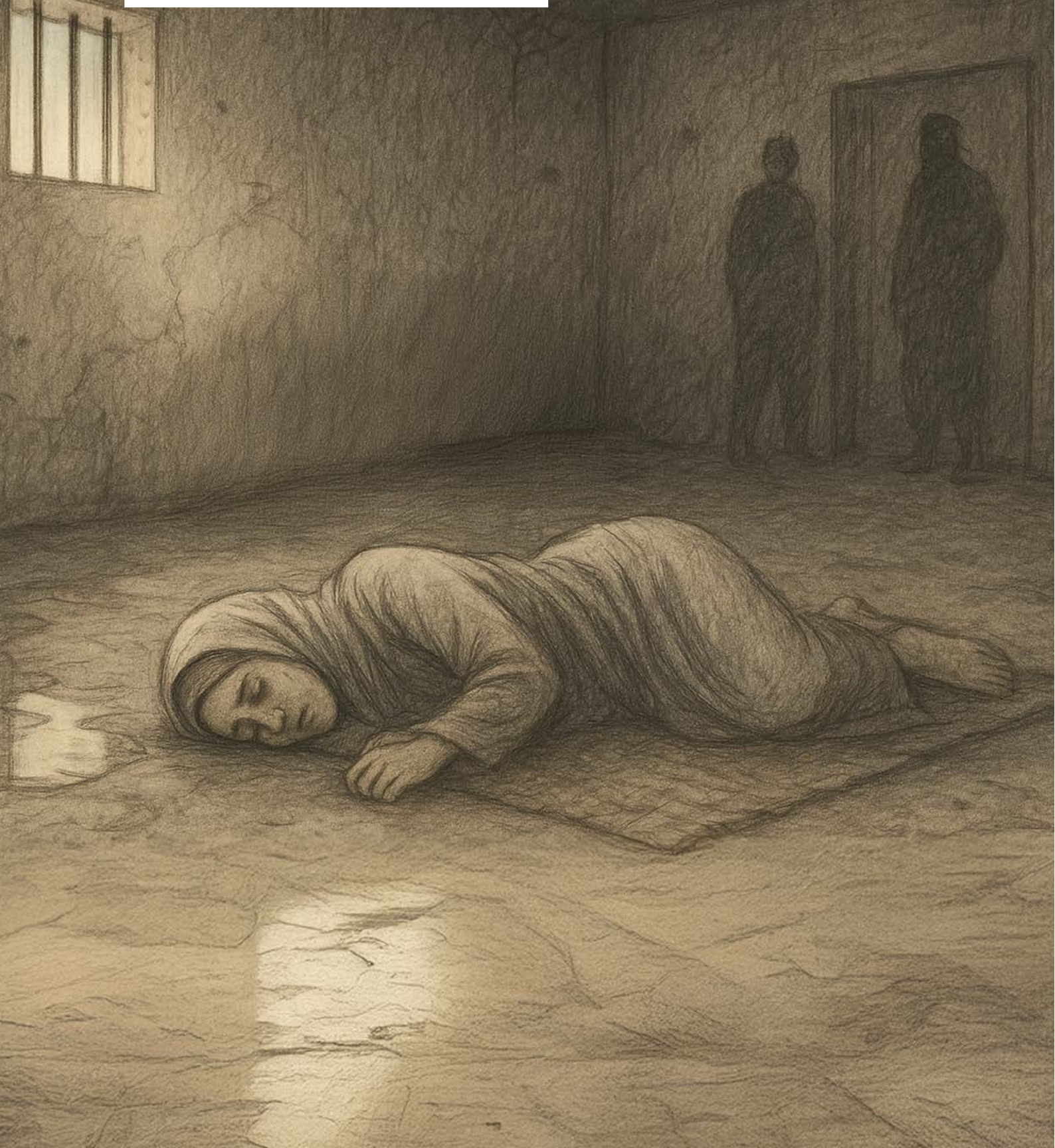
“They would put a plastic bag over my head, and I would lose my breath and pass out. I fainted 11 times. Their insistence was for me to say which country I was spying for and which political figure supported me. No matter how much I said I wasn’t a spy and didn’t get money from foreigners, they wouldn’t accept it and tortured me⁸².”

⁸⁰ Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025.

⁸¹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.

⁸² Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025.

"When I said I wasn't a spy and had protested for my rights, they started beating me. They handcuffed my hands, repeatedly poured cold water on me, and beat me until I lost consciousness. I saw no mercy in them. Each time, they kicked my stomach so hard I passed out. They never considered that these blows could kill me."





A woman protester, who had a similar experience, described this form of torture:

“During the interrogation, as I was answering their questions, one of them casually took a plastic bag from his pocket, shook it open, then put my head inside it. He stood behind me and pulled it towards himself, so the plastic pressed against my nose and mouth. I couldn’t breathe, and at that moment, my hands were also tied⁸³.”

Information from our interviewees reveals that the Taliban repeatedly tortured victims with this method, showing no regard for the consequences or the physical and psychological pain inflicted upon the victims:

“Then they started suffocating me. About fifteen to sixteen times, they put my head inside a plastic bag and tied it around my neck, making me feel severely suffocated. There was nothing to say or confess. Then they took me into the room. Every three or four hours, they would come and take me for torture⁸⁴.”

5 - Electric Shocks

Our research reveals that electric shocks were a common torture method, primarily used by intelligence directorate agents. They would seat victims on a chair and attach electrical wires to their bodies, inflicting severe pain through electric current, aiming to extract confessions, acknowledgments, or to intimidate. The use of electric shocks, as outlined in Article 1 of the International Convention Against Torture, causes severe physical and mental pain, clearly constituting physical torture as it violates both the victims’ bodily integrity and human dignity.

Our findings indicate that 15 of the interviewees were tortured with electric shocks by Taliban intelligence and police agents.



One woman protester recounted:

“...They beat me severely. They put an iron in my hand, and I didn’t know what happened; my whole body trembled, and I lost consciousness. After regaining consciousness, I was very tired and asked the guards for water, but they refused. When I went to the toilet to drink water, I fainted, and when I regained consciousness, I had an IV drip connected to my hand. They had injected me two or three times because I saw the blackness

⁸³ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

⁸⁴ Rawadari, Interviewee No 5, 27 April 2025.

and marks. After thirty days, I felt helpless and desperate at that moment and cried a lot⁸⁵.”



Another woman protester also described this torture method:

“They wanted my phone code, which I refused to give. He said, ‘This girl is very resistant and doesn’t listen, take her upstairs and give her electric shocks.’ They gave me electric shocks, and I was unconscious for half an hour, not knowing what else they did during that time. When I regained consciousness, I had shortness of breath and couldn’t speak. They poured water on my face⁸⁶...”

Another victim, arrested for civil activities, endured humiliation and verbal abuse alongside electric shocks:

“Then they tied me tightly to a chair and electrocuted me. They said, ‘Dog of the Republic, now call your masters to free you from us.’ I screamed and cried. An hour later, they returned and continued the electric shocks and torture. They hit my head and face with a cable and called me a rebel and a dog of the Republic⁸⁷.”

Our report’s findings also show that electric shocks have had lasting damaging effects on victims’ physical and mental health:

“On the third day of interrogation, besides beatings and waterboarding, they turned on a generator near the interrogation room and connected two wires to my body. It shook me so violently that I would jump up and fall back to the ground. They had no mercy and were very cruel. After the torture, I wished for death. I became so weak and helpless that I involuntarily ejaculated every night. Currently, I have lost my sexual ability due to these tortures⁸⁸.”

85 Rawadari, Interviewee No 29, 18 April 2025.

86 Rawadari, Interviewee No 32, 26 May 2025.

87 Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025.

88 Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.

6 - Hanging from the Ceiling

According to two victims, another torture method used in GDI prisons was hanging from the ceiling. In this method, the victims' hands or feet were tied to the ceiling, and they were held in that position for hours. One woman protester recounted:



"Once, they hung me from the ceiling for a whole night and day. Both my hands were tied to an iron bar in the room's ceiling, so my toes barely touched the ground. Then they hit my buttocks with a cable. My hands and feet swelled, my back hurt, and I couldn't stand. During this time, I wasn't allowed to eat or use the toilet. When they lowered me, my hands and feet were immobile, and my back hurt severely. I still have neck pain and can't walk long distances⁸⁹."

A former government employee, who endured this method despite in addition to other forms of severe torture, stated:

"In the final stage, they hung me by my feet for approximately two hours and beat me like a punching bag. They hit my stomach and legs, asking, 'Why don't you confess?' Finally, they said, 'We will execute you in public to make an example for American spies.' They tortured me like this, and every moment I wished for death. I told them, 'It doesn't matter to me at all, do it as soon as possible because I can't bear this suffering and torture anymore⁹⁰.'"

7 - "Chapeh Wulchak" (Reverse Handcuffing)

Four of the victims reported that the Taliban also tortured them using the "chapeh wulchak" (reverse handcuffing) method. One victim described this torture as follows:



"Another torture method was 'chapeh wulchak'. They would handcuff one hand from above the arm and the other from below, so the hands couldn't meet. This caused severe pain and pressure that would last for two to three days. It was incredibly difficult. One of them would put their foot on my back and forcefully tighten the handcuff. They kept the handcuff on for between half an hour and three hours. Everyone tortured this

⁸⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

⁹⁰ Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.

way would scream continuously, saying, 'I'll confess whatever you want'⁹¹."

Another victim also stated:

"He returned and removed the handcuffs. He cuffed one hand from above my shoulder and the other behind my head together. I felt severe pain in my arms and shoulders. They tied my neck with a rope to the window bars... Then they filmed me, insulted me, pulled my hair, and asked, 'Have you repented now'⁹²?"

8 - Torture for Recreation and Amusement

Our research findings indicate that the Taliban did not shy away from any cruel or inhumane behaviour towards victims. For instance, two interviewees reported that the Taliban sometimes tortured them for their own entertainment.



One woman protestor recounted:

"They would wrap a cloth around my neck and choke me, and when I coughed, they would laugh. Or they would unexpectedly pour cold water on me, and when I got scared, they would all laugh loudly, so much so that I thought they were going to faint from laughter. At that moment, I felt a very bad feeling that they were enjoying torturing me'⁹³."

Another victim offered an even more disturbing account:

"Another time, they tightly wrapped a blanket around my waist, and two people pulled it hard and forcefully from both sides. I felt severe pressure on my abdomen and lost control of myself.... and soiled my clothes. They laughed at me, and I was so ashamed that at that moment, I wished I were dead'⁹⁴."

91 Rawadari, Interviewee No 5, 27 April 2025

92 Rawadari, Interviewee No 33, 17 April 2025.

93 Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

94 Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.

"They would put a plastic bag over my head, and I would lose my breath and pass out. I fainted 11 times. Their insistence was for me to say which country I was spying for and which political figure supported me. No matter how much I said I wasn't a spy and didn't get money from foreigners, they wouldn't accept it and tortured me."



B. Psychological Torture and Ill-Treatment

Psychological torture is a prominent form of torment, inflicting severe mental suffering directly on the victim or indirectly on their family. According to Article 1 of the Convention Against Torture, if a public official intentionally causes such extreme distress to obtain information, a confession, or for coercion or discrimination, it constitutes psychological torture. The Istanbul Protocol thoroughly details various methods of psychological torture, emphasizing that mental anguish can be as severe and devastating as physical pain.

All interviewees reported experiencing various forms of psychological torture from the moment of their arrest until release, especially during interrogation. These methods primarily included humiliation and insults, cursing, threats of murder, execution, stoning, or being buried alive, threats of beheading victims and their family members, threats of arresting family members, ethnic and religious humiliation, prolonged solitary confinement, and forced confessions.

Our report's findings illustrate that the Taliban deliberately used diverse methods of psychological torture and ill-treatment to extract confessions, obtain information, or to humiliate and intimidate victims. These actions directly violate international human rights standards, infringe upon human dignity, and are a clear breach of Article 1 of the International Convention Against Torture.

1-Humiliation and Insult

Our findings indicate that verbal abuse, humiliation, and insulting victims were common forms of psychological torture used by the Taliban. All 34 interviewees reported being repeatedly subjected to verbal violence, humiliation, and insults during and after their detention. The Taliban frequently used terms and labels like "spy, rebel, apostate, infidel, prostitute, whore, weak woman, American slave, Western slave, traitor, corrupt, dishonourable, dog, and evil" to demean and insult victims. The Taliban also used other derogatory terms for detained women that interviewees ethically refrained from mentioning.



One woman interviewee who endured gender-based humiliation and verbal abuse from Taliban forces during detention, recounted:

"They would tell me, 'You're a zaeefa (derogatory term for woman) and can't even walk properly, how did you protest against our regime, where do you get support from, how much money did you take, and with your condition, how did you dare to protest against the regime⁹⁵?'"

Another victim stated:

"One of them, in a harsh tone and with curses, said, 'You spy and slave, why are you spreading propaganda against the

95 Rawadari, Interviewee No 26, 25 April 2025.



Islamic Emirate?’ I said I had never spread propaganda and was not a spy or against the Emirate. One of them approached me and slapped me hard. Another came and beat me with a rifle butt and kicks. No matter how much I asked why they were hitting me and what my crime was, they would say, ‘Shut up, you dishonourable spy, your face doesn’t look like a Muslim⁹⁶.’”

Similarly, another victim stated about this type of psychological torture:

“On the way, they said, ‘We’ll kill you.’ Their commander said, ‘Shove the stick so hard into his anus that it comes out of his mouth.’ They called me corrupt and infidel, and one said, ‘God has even twisted his face, he doesn’t look human at all⁹⁷.’”

Furthermore, in some cases, the Taliban insulted and disrespected victims’ families to exert psychological pressure:

“They tortured me psychologically a lot. They cursed my wife and children. They thought I had killed hundreds of Taliban⁹⁸.’

2 - Threats of Murder, Beheading, Execution, Stoning, and Being Buried Alive

Twenty-eight interviewees reported that during interrogation, the Taliban, in addition to other torture methods, also threatened them with murder, execution, stoning, and being buried alive to extract confessions and information.

Threatening prisoners with execution or other forms of killing is a clear instance of psychological torture that causes severe harm to victims’ mental health. The following narratives are just a few examples of the countless experiences of prisoners subjected to this type of torture:



“When they transferred me from the first detention place to the second, they said, ‘Perform ablution and pray, because we will shoot you.’ I said, ‘There’s nothing left for me, whatever you do, do it quickly because I can’t bear this torture anymore.’ Then I recited my kalima (declaration of faith) and waited to be killed⁹⁹.’”

⁹⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 7, 25 April 2025.

⁹⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 33, 17 April 2025.

⁹⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 12, 29 April 2025.

⁹⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.



Another victim recounted a similar experience:

“On the first night, after they tortured me, they said, ‘Pray and recite your kalima, because tomorrow we will kill you.’ I didn’t sleep that night, waiting to see how I would be killed... Another time, one of the torturers pulled a knife from his pocket and said, ‘We will cut your throat, we will slaughter you.’ He put the knife on his palm and said, ‘See how sharp it is’¹⁰⁰.”

Another common method of psychological torture, as mentioned, was threatening victims with execution. A human rights activist stated:

“They pointed a gun at my head and said, ‘Either confess or we’ll kill you right here.’ They said because I acted against the Emirate, I would be executed soon¹⁰¹.”

Another interviewee spoke of a similar experience:

“They were saying among themselves that killing this person is permissible, and we should execute him to set an example for others not to protest against our government again. Then one came and told me, ‘I’m telling you out of compassion, tell the truth tomorrow, otherwise they will execute you’¹⁰².”

Our information reveals that threats of killing victims were widely used against individuals facing various accusations. For example, the Taliban also threatened some arrested women protesters with being buried alive and stoning:



“The female guards told us, ‘Be prepared, you will be buried alive. You are going to be stoned. Sometimes they would say you would be beaten on the soles of your feet and then have to walk on salt’¹⁰³.”

Similarly, another woman protester stated:

“Besides saying they had brought all my family, including my parents, to Pul-e-Charkhi prison, they also threatened me with stoning and said I would be stoned in the coming days¹⁰⁴.”

100 Rawadari, Interviewee No 7, 27 April 2025.

101 Rawadari, Interviewee No 24, 26 April 2025.

102 Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025.

103 Rawadari, Interviewee No 25, 20 April 2025.

104 Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

3 - Threats of Murdering and Beheading Family Members

Threats of murdering or harming victims' family members, when deliberate and intended to extract confessions or intimidate, constitute a severe form of psychological torture prohibited by Article 1 of the Convention Against Torture. Such acts not only violate human dignity but also inflict intense psychological suffering on victims.



Four of the interviewees stated that Taliban intelligence threatened to kill and behead their family members.

"They told me to confess, or else my family would be killed. They called a family member living abroad and said, to prevent harm to the rest of our family, you have to reveal their location and address. ...Then they said if I didn't remove the news of my arrest from the media, they would kill my family members¹⁰⁵."

In another case, the Taliban tortured a victim with the following horrifying method to obtain a confession and information:

"On the third night when they took me for interrogation, they showed me pictures of my children and said if I loved them, I should confess which country I was spying for and from whom I was receiving orders. At that moment, I was in a terrible state. I cried and pleaded with them not to harm my children. I said if protesting is a crime, I had committed it. But they said nothing. It was truly a terrifying night. I had gone mad and couldn't control myself. I even wished for my own death¹⁰⁶."

Similarly, in another instance, the Taliban even threatened a victim with beheading their children, which represents the most severe and horrific type of psychological torture:

"They would say, 'We'll arrest your son and behead him in front of you.' When I recall that scene, I feel sick¹⁰⁷."

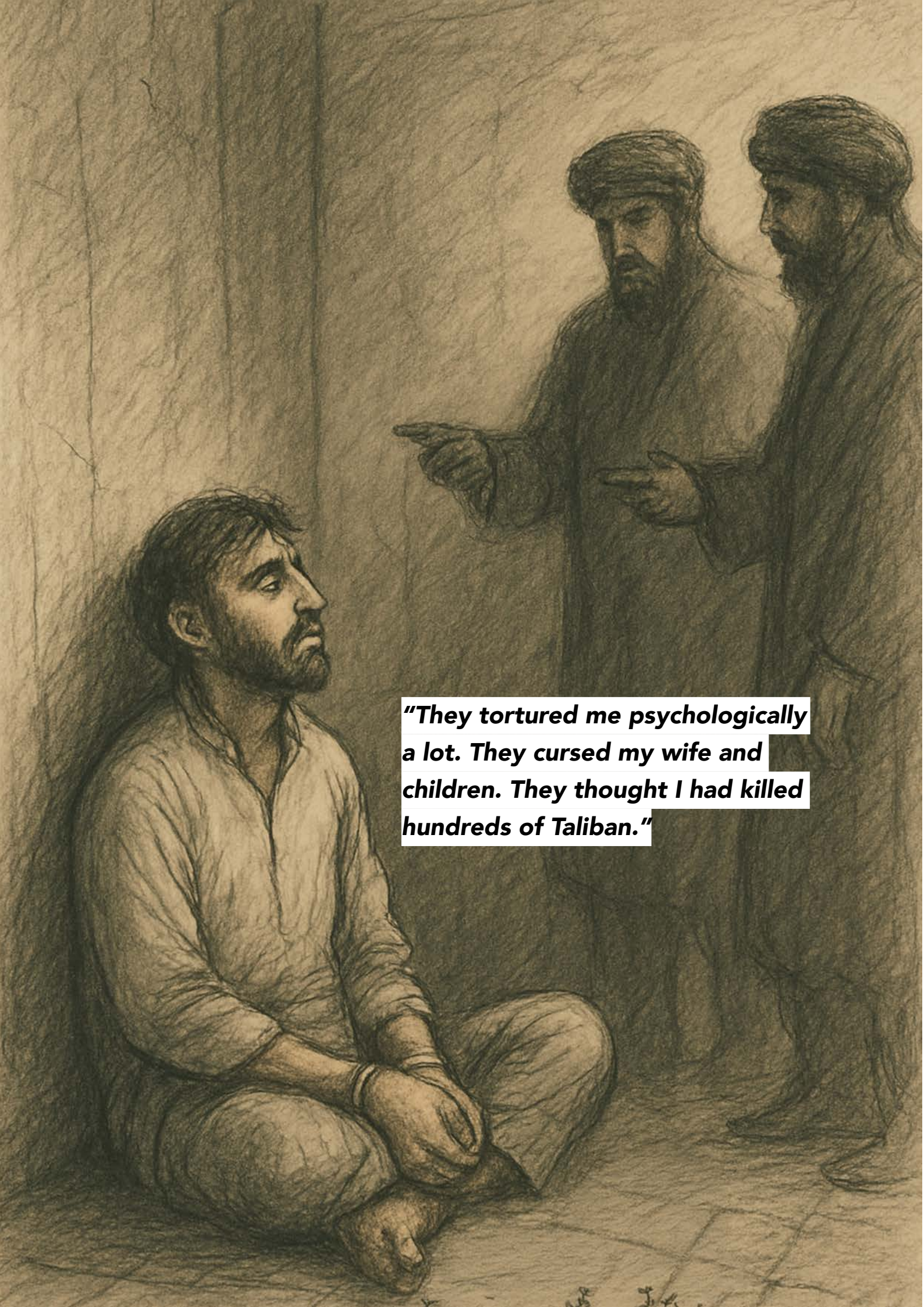
4 - Threats of Arresting and Harassing Family Members

Another method of psychological torture, according to interviewees, was threatening to arrest their family members. In some cases, the Taliban even detained these victims' family members to create fear and psychological pressure. Nine interviewees reported that during interrogation, Taliban intelligence agents threatened to arrest and harassed their family members. The Taliban deliberately made these threats to extract confessions and acknowledgments.

¹⁰⁵ Rawadari, Interviewee No 24, 20 April 2025.

¹⁰⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 8, 15 April 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.



"They tortured me psychologically a lot. They cursed my wife and children. They thought I had killed hundreds of Taliban."



One victim recounted:

“They told me that if I cared about my other family members, I should tell the truth, and if I didn’t, they knew where we lived and could easily imprison my family members¹⁰⁸.”

Similarly, another victim stated:

“Sometimes they would say that they would bring my father and imprison him with me, or they would say my family couldn’t go anywhere from them, they had all our information¹⁰⁹.”

In some cases, the Taliban even arrested family members to exert psychological pressure and fear on victims:

“Because I wouldn’t accept (to repeat) their fabricated confession, they brought my father to torture him in front of my eyes. I was forced to give them what they wanted so they wouldn’t torture my father¹¹⁰.”

In some instances, torturers went beyond these psychological threats, harassing victims’ family members through other methods.



The disturbing account of another victim clearly illustrates this:

“The last stage of interrogation was checking my phone. They opened my photo gallery and viewed all my pictures, including family photos. When they saw my wife’s picture, one Taliban member told his colleague, ‘What a beautiful wife he has... should we order her brought in and interrogate her too?’ This really hit me hard, and I thought, ‘What kind of dishonourable people have I fallen in with?’... A few days later, when my family visited, I asked about my wife and children. They said the Taliban had brought them in for interrogation several times and harassed them. That’s why they were forced to flee the country¹¹¹.”

108 Rawadari, Interviewee No 26, 25 April 2025.

109 Rawadari, Interviewee No 30, 3 May 2025.

110 Rawadari, Interviewee No 31, 25 May 2025.

111 Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025.



Another victim offered a different account:

“They would tell me to confess, or else they would divorce my wife, or give her to someone else. Sometimes they would say they would wipe out my lineage¹¹².”

5 - Ethnic and Religion-based Humiliation and Insult

Our findings illustrate that victims' ethnic and religious identities influenced the severity of torture inflicted upon them. Some detainees reported that alongside other forms of torture, they were also subjected to ethnic and religious humiliation and insult.

Nine interviewees specifically stated that from initial detention to interrogation, they faced constant ethnic and religious insults. The Taliban used this torture method to humiliate victims and inflict greater psychological pressure.

“Hazara infidel, Hazara son of a cursed father, Hazara prostitutes, and Rafizi,” were phrases the Taliban used to humiliate victims.



One victim recounted a shocking narrative:

“They insulted me relentlessly for being Hazara, saying any harm to me was permissible for them... They called me an absolute infidel and said I must follow their religion¹¹³.”

Another interviewee stated:

“From the very beginning, they cursed me ethnically and religiously. They called me an infidel and a Rafizi¹¹⁴. They asked if I knew how to recite the kalima. They forced me to recite the kalima, then said, ‘No, you are an infidel, you should recite it like this¹¹⁵.’”

Furthermore, another victim stated:

“They cursed me as ‘Hazara,’ insulted our ethnicity, and said, ‘You don’t deserve us to fire a single bullet at your head. A single bullet is wasted on you¹¹⁶.’”

112 Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.

113 Rawadari, Interviewee No 26, 25 April 2025.

114 Or Rafida. A term that is sometimes used to demean Shia Muslims.

115 Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

116 Rawadari, Interviewee No 34, 20 April 2025.



Additionally, the narratives of two other victims confirm:

"...They transferred us with our eyes and hands tied to the GDI Department 40. When we arrived, they told the guards, 'We've brought the Hazara prostitutes'¹¹⁷."

"During detention, they called us Hazara infidel, Hazara son of a cursed father, and other insulting terms. They said, 'You are infidels and must be killed'¹¹⁸."

These narratives show that ethnic and religious humiliation and insult were used as tools for individual degradation and as a method of psychological pressure against victims. This behavior not only constitutes discrimination but can also be considered a form of psychological torture.

6 - Prevention of Religious Observance

Preventing religious observances, if intentional, discriminatory, and accompanied by psychological suffering, can be considered psychological torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. Despite this, five interviewees stated that during their detention, they could not freely practice their religious observances or lacked access to them.



One victim recounted:

"Their behaviour was entirely discriminatory. They criticized my way of praying, treated me poorly, and often forced me to pray without going to the bathroom or performing ablution'¹¹⁹."

Another victim recounted:

"For the first two days, they didn't allow me to pray. After the second day, I told them, 'I am also a Muslim; please allow me to use the restroom and perform ablution so I can pray.' They responded, 'You are an infidel,' and cursed and swore at me'¹²⁰."

Similarly, another victim, who was forced to pray against his religious beliefs during detention, stated:

"I had to pray in a line with other prisoners, with my hands tied. In Shia Islam, prayers are performed three times a day; but in prison, I was forced to pray five times a day with other prisoners according to their ways. Also, they threw us into a cell

¹¹⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 29, 18 April 2025.

¹¹⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 22, 23 April 2025.

¹¹⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 12, 29 April 2025.

¹²⁰ Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.

with Daesh (Islamic State) members; they were very extremist and dangerous, and we couldn't sleep at night out of fear¹²¹."

Another interviewee, who witnessed the torture and ill-treatment of a prisoner due to differences in his worship method, stated:

"In the monitoring cell, a Shia person was with us who prayed with open hands according to his religious beliefs. Just for this reason, he was insulted and eventually severely tortured¹²²."

7 - Solitary Confinement

Principle 44 of the Nelson Mandela Rules clearly states that holding prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact is forbidden. Furthermore, according to Article 1 of the Convention Against Torture, if prisoners are held in solitary confinement to inflict severe psychological and physical suffering, obtain information, or for punishment, it constitutes a clear instance of torture. Our collected narratives indicate that the Taliban deliberately held victims in inhumane conditions for prolonged periods in solitary confinement cells to inflict severe pain and suffering and to extract confessions or psychological pressure. Twenty-one out of 34 interviewees reported spending long periods in solitary confinement under inadequate conditions, lacking even the most basic sanitary facilities.



One interviewee, arrested for civil activities, stated:

"They transferred me with my eyes blindfolded to Intelligence Department 40, and I was held in a solitary confinement cell for 38 days as punishment. It was a narrow, small room where I couldn't even stretch my legs¹²³."

Similarly, another interviewee recounted:

"I was in solitary confinement for approximately a month. Then they took me to a basement where other women protestors were also imprisoned. Three women were held on charges of establishing an English course and a sports club for women¹²⁴."

Prolonged solitary confinement constitutes a clear instance of torture and ill-treatment, and its continuation in unhygienic conditions is a compounding violation. Our findings show that a significant number of detainees were held in such conditions.

121 Rawadari, Interviewee No 22, 23 April 2025.

122 Rawadari, Interviewee No 33, 17 April 2025.

123 Rawadari, Interviewee No 30, 3 May 2025.

124 Rawadari, Interviewee No 32, 24 May 2025.



One interviewee stated:

“I was in a solitary confinement cell for an entire week, with nothing but an old, dirty piece of carpet. Previous occupants had urinated there; it smelled awful and was so filthy I couldn’t breathe. They allowed me to use the toilet only three times in 24 hours; no matter how much I insisted beyond that, they refused. The air was very cold, and I was forced to urinate there like the previous people (detainees)... The situation was terrible¹²⁵.”

A women’s rights activist, arrested for protesting school closures, recounted:

“I spent 39 days in a solitary confinement cell, a place worse and filthier than a stable. There was only a very old, dirty piece of carpet covered in blood, oil, and food, and it smelled terrible. The room’s ceiling was also covered in cobwebs¹²⁶.”

8 - Repeated Interrogations and Forced Confessions

Repeated interrogations and forced confessions, in any form, whether through physical or psychological torture, represent flagrant human rights violations, contravene fair trial standards, and contradict international instruments. These documents categorize repeated and prolonged interrogations as a destructive form of psychological torture, aimed at continuously undermining will and causing severe mental distress in the victim. Such acts, when intended to obtain information, forced confessions, or for punishment, also violate Article 1 of the International Convention Against Torture.

Our research found that the Taliban repeatedly interrogated the interviewed detainees to extract forced confessions. Some victims faced up to ten interrogations a day, with women protestors and human rights defenders often subjected to more frequent and intense psychological and physical pressure.

Taliban interrogators frequently asked victims questions like: “Why did you rebel against the Islamic Emirate?”, “Why did you stand against the Islamic system?”, “Which country financially supports you?”, “Which country are you a spy for?”, “Why do you prepare reports for foreigners and infidels?”, “Why did you burn women’s burqas?”, “For whom do you work?”, “How many women’s protests did you participate in?”, “Why did you work with Americans and foreigners?”, “Why do you promote promiscuity and adultery in society?”, “Why do you encourage girls to get an education to become prostitutes?”, “Why do you work for infidel democracy and human rights?”, “Which organization and media do you work with?”, and “Who are your colleagues and leaders?” Interviewees also noted that the Taliban, using various torture methods (as previously explained), forced them to answer according to the interrogators’ preconceived notions and to confess to things they had never done.

¹²⁵ Rawadari, Interviewee No 22, 23 April 2025.

¹²⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

The GDI often conducted prolonged interrogations. Two interviewees stated that foreign individuals also interrogated them in the directorate's monitoring facilities.

26 out of 34 interviewees stated that they were forced to make confessions under the pressure of torture and ill-treatment. Among these, 8 individuals also provided video confessions alongside written ones.



One education activist recounted:

"They told me to wash my hands and face with water and say in front of the camera, 'I worked in the Republic for the promotion of immorality and received money from foreign countries to support women's rights and discredit the Islamic Emirate. After this, I will not do such a thing again, and I apologize to the leadership of the Islamic Emirate and the people of Afghanistan'¹²⁷."

Another interviewee, a woman protester, stated:

"After 21 days of interrogation, they took two forced confessions, written and video, at the GDI... They told me to say I had participated in these protests to go abroad, in support of the Resistance Front, and to receive money. I screamed and sat on the ground, saying I had never received money from abroad and had no connection with any military front or political figures. Our movement is spontaneous, and we only protested for education and women's rights. They said if I didn't confess, they would sentence me to one year in prison. Finally, I was forced to confess¹²⁸."

Another interviewee stated:

"I was forced to read a text they had given me, praise the Taliban, and express regret for my actions. They filmed me. They hit my shoulder with a rifle butt and forcibly removed the mask from my face¹²⁹."

127 Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025.

128 Rawadari, Interviewee No 32, 24 May 2025.

129 Rawadari, Interviewee No 25, 20 April 2025.

Furthermore, in many cases, human rights defenders, especially women protestors, not only confessed to what the interrogators dictated but were also forced to apologize to Taliban leaders.



“They forcibly took two video confessions from me. In one, I was forced to apologize to Mullah Hibatullah, the Taliban leader, and in the other, I was forced to confess to participating in demonstrations and protesting against the Taliban’s policies, stating that I acted out of deception and at the command of opponents of the Islamic Emirate, and I express regret¹³⁰.”

Confessions obtained through torture subsequently served as the basis for trials and punishments in Taliban courts. This practice stands in complete contradiction to international human rights instruments, including Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and constitutes a clear violation of fair trial principles.

9 - Detention in Secret Prisons and Inhumane Conditions

According to international human rights instruments, including the Nelson Mandela Rules, every detained person must be held in appropriate conditions with respect for human dignity. The detention of individuals in unofficial, secret, or so-called private prisons is strictly prohibited. Therefore, holding detainees in inhumane conditions and in unofficial or secret places can constitute a clear instance of torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

Our findings show that 3 out of 34 interviewees were held in private and unofficial prisons for varying periods. According to their testimonies, the Taliban held them in inhumane conditions in secret and unofficial prisons while repeatedly torturing and ill-treating them.



One interviewee, describing the inhumane conditions of his place of detention, stated:
“After being arrested, they first transferred me to an old house where I thought no other houses existed nearby. Seven to eight armed men were present, and I was imprisoned in a small room within that house for 21 days. For two days and nights, they didn’t allow me to use the toilet. Every time I screamed, they would come and hit me with the butt of their rifle and say, ‘Eat your own urine and feces here...’ On the other hand, the psychological pressures were very severe, and I was forced to urinate and defecate in my clothes right there. Then they transferred me to another place in a basement that had a toilet and a messy kitchen with some dirty dishes. This place

130 Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

had two rooms where various torture tools such as chains and handcuffs, electric batons, and broken chairs could be seen.... Both locations were actually secret and unofficial detention centres¹³¹."

A former military personnel who was detained and tortured for a period in Taliban private prisons recounted:

"I was held in private prisons. After being arrested, they imprisoned me near a mountain further from our village, which resembled a police checkpoint as they had armed personnel and a cook. Then they drove me in a private car to another place about three hours away. From their conversations, I understood it was another province, and they kept me in a private prison. After a few nights, they took me back to the first location¹³²."

Similarly, another interviewee provided this information:

"A prisoner from Samangan province was in our cell. He said that a local Taliban official ordered his arrest, and he was detained and tortured for 40 days in Shakar Dara district in a private prison. After 40 days, they transferred him to the district administration and from there to the intelligence directorate's monitoring facility in Kabul¹³³."

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is one of the most serious forms of torture, inflicting deep and devastating harm on victims. This type of torture can have both physical and psychological dimensions, causing severe physical and mental pain and suffering. If sexual harassment is carried out with the goals of obtaining information or confessions, or for punishment, intimidation, or humiliation, it constitutes a clear and prominent instance of torture under Article 1 of the Convention Against Torture.

The Istanbul Protocol explicitly defines stripping, touching, and sexual insults as components of sexual torture and methods of psychological torture. International instruments mandate states to protect women from all forms of sexual violence, including in detention centres.

¹³¹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.

¹³² Rawadari, Interviewee No 12, 29 April 2025.

¹³³ Rawadari, Interviewee No 22, 23 April 2025.



"The last stage of interrogation was checking my phone. They opened my photo gallery and viewed all my pictures, including family photos. When they saw my wife's picture, one Taliban member told his colleague, 'What a beautiful wife he has... should we order her brought in and interrogate her too?' This really hit me hard, and I thought, 'What kind of dishonourable people have I fallen in with?'... A few days later, when my family visited, I asked about my wife and children. They said the Taliban had brought them in for interrogation several times and harassed them. That's why they were forced to flee the country."

6 of the 7 women interviewees in this report stated that in addition to other forms of physical and psychological torture in detention, they were also subjected to sexual harassment by Taliban intelligence and police agents.

Methods like “touching the body, stripping, and sexual insults’ were used to harass victims. All victims were women protestors, and five of them belonged to the Hazara ethnic and Shia religious minorities. Some victims experienced all these forms of sexual harassment simultaneously.

1 - Stripping

Two of the interviewed women stated that the Taliban stripped them during their detention. These actions, aimed at humiliating, intimidating, and punishing victims, demonstrate that the Taliban employed every method to torture the detainees.



One victim, who wept and struggled to speak about her traumatic experience of harassment, recounted:

“It was a horrifying night; even thinking and talking about it is difficult and disturbing for me. Though much time has passed, I still can’t speak about what happened. More than five men in military and local clothing first threatened me, saying I had to speak and give them information about my accomplices. When I said I knew no one, they stripped me naked and filmed me¹³⁴.”

In another interviewee’s account, sexual harassment was intertwined with attacks to the victim’s ethnic identity:

“A female staff member took me to a small room and removed all my clothes. She examined my entire body. I suddenly realized the room had a camera, and I was naked. I protested. She replied, ‘You Hazara girls are ill-reputed and ill-behaved. I examined your body because tomorrow you’ll publish your naked photo on social media to defame the Taliban¹³⁵.’”

2- Touching the Body

Out of the seven interviewed women, one stated that the Taliban sexually harassed her by touching her body during physical torture:



“The scene was incredibly disturbing. When they hung me from the prison ceiling, they also subjected me to physical sexual abuse. The male torturers touched my body and laughed. One

134 Rawadari, Interviewee No 8, 15 April 2025.

135 Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

said, 'Look at her hair,' another, 'How white her body is.' At that moment, I screamed so much that I lost my voice¹³⁶."

Additionally, another interviewee spoke of the possibility of sexual harassment during torture and interrogation:

"When I would lose consciousness from the intensity of the torture and then regain consciousness, I would feel that my collar and clothes were torn. Those were difficult and dark days that I spent in prison¹³⁷."

It is worth noting that this interviewee, in another part of her statement, also referred to threats of rape by the Taliban.

3 - Verbal Sexual Harassment

Six of our interviewees reported being repeatedly subjected to verbal sexual harassment by the Taliban during their detention. According to these individuals, this behavior continued from the moment of arrest through interrogation and until their release, forming part of the violent and humiliating atmosphere of detention.



One victim, arrested for protesting against the Taliban, recounted:

"As a human being, I'm ashamed to repeat the crude things they said to me. Their simplest curse was 'prostitute.' If they took me for interrogation, they'd call me a prostitute; if they asked a question, they'd call me a prostitute; if they told me to sit, they'd call me a prostitute; and if they told me to stand up, they'd also call me a prostitute. While they knew all my details, including my name and surname, they never called me by my name and didn't treat me like a prisoner. They repeatedly told me, 'How dishonourable you people are, you have no men to watch you and control you¹³⁸.'"

Additionally, another interviewee spoke of her constant harassment by the Taliban:

"They were very strange. At night, they would take their cup of tea, open my cell door, and harass me. They would talk and laugh among themselves, staring at me, and say sexual insults. They said extremely vulgar things that I'm ashamed to repeat."

136 Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

137 Rawadari, Interviewee No 26, 25 April 2025.

138 Rawadari, Interviewee No 8, 15 April 2025.

They asked, 'Are you working with infidels?' They thought I was providing sexual services and came with that motive. I felt like I belonged to one planet, and they belonged to another¹³⁹."

As previously mentioned and confirmed by two women victims, the Taliban repeatedly used vulgar and insulting language to humiliate and insult women protestors:

"...They would say, 'You are a prostitute and an infidel whore, and you get money from abroad'¹⁴⁰."

Another victim stated:

"They asked, 'Which country supports you?' I said, 'No country supports me.' We expected at least one or two women in your cabinet. At that moment, one of them slapped my face and said, 'You prostitute whore. You want to discredit our government'¹⁴¹..."

WITNESSING THE TORTURE OF OTHERS

When the witnessing of others' torture is intentional and deliberate, this act constitutes psychological torture for the observers. The Istanbul Protocol emphasizes that forcing individuals to witness the torture of others, regardless of whether it inflicts physical pain on the witness, is a form of torture due to the severe psychological suffering it causes. Although in some interviewees' narratives, the element of direct intent is not explicitly mentioned, the mere fact of being in such an environment constitutes cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment for the witnesses and evidence of the existence of torture in detention facilities.

19 out of 34 interviewees stated they were directly or indirectly exposed to the torture of other prisoners. Eight of them explicitly saw other prisoners being tortured, while 11 others heard the cries and screams of victims during torture.



One victim who directly witnessed the torture of other detainees recounted:

"They brought a man, about 37, and a 14- or 15-year-old child, accused of theft, into my cell at the intelligence monitoring facility. Then one of them called someone, mentioned a name, and said, 'Tell him two thieves have arrived, and he should come punish them.' They said he was busy with his wedding but would get the message. A few hours later, that person arrived with

¹³⁹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

¹⁴⁰ Rawadari, Interviewee No 32, 24 May 2025.

¹⁴¹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 29, 18 April 2025.

two others. Then, they severely beat the child and the man in front of me with the same water pipe they used to torture me. The child's screams were incredibly painful and disturbing.¹⁴²

This account also highlights the GDI's extra-judicial authority in detaining individuals suspected of criminal offenses, which typically falls under the police jurisdiction. Such actions demonstrate the DFA's legal chaos and arbitrary conduct.



Similarly, another interviewee stated:

"An old man from Jurm district of Badakhshan was tortured so severely for having a photo with an army soldier that he forgot how to speak¹⁴³."

Another interviewee stated:

"Some detainees were tortured in front of us with electric shocks, by pressing their nails with pliers, and with cable blows. We screamed from the intensity of the pain and horror of that scene and wished for our own death¹⁴⁴."

Several interviewees reported hearing the groans and pleas of other prisoners during their detention:

"I didn't personally witness anyone being tortured, but I heard the cries and screams of other prisoners, which were sometimes so loud at night that we would cover our ears to avoid hearing those disturbing sounds¹⁴⁵."

Similarly, another victim recounted:

"One night, while I wasn't feeling well and had fallen asleep sitting, I woke up to the sound of a male prisoner crying and begging in Pashto, 'Qari Sahib, I repent, don't hit me, Maulvi Sahib, I repent, don't hit me.' His voice was very loud, but a little further from my cell¹⁴⁶."

142 Rawadari, Interviewee No 7, 27 April 2025.

143 Rawadari, Interviewee No 9, 12 May 2025.

144 Rawadari, Interviewee No 2, 3 Jun 2025.

145 Rawadari, Interviewee No 34, 20 April 2025.

146 Rawadari, Interviewee No 3, 28 April 2025.

"I spent 39 days in a solitary confinement cell, a place worse and filthier than a stable. There was only a very old, dirty piece of carpet covered in blood, oil, and food, and it smelled terrible. The room's ceiling was also covered in cobwebs."



KILLING OF PRISONERS

The killing of detainees or prisoners represents one of the most egregious and horrific human rights violations. It simultaneously breaches the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture, both of which guarantee the right to life and freedom from torture. Such actions are strictly prohibited and entail international legal responsibility for their perpetrators.

Despite this, seven interviewees in this study provided horrifying accounts of prisoner deaths due to torture in Taliban-controlled detention facilities. Three of them directly witnessed these cases, while four others spoke about them through heard accounts or observations.



One interviewee who witnessed a prisoner's death stated:

"One of my cellmates was a young man from Ragh district. When they tortured him, blood flowed from his ear. Two days later, he died. They said he committed suicide; but we saw his body taken out with broken hands and feet¹⁴⁷."

Similarly, another victim stated that after seizing power, the Taliban arrested and then killed two of his former colleagues:

"In 2022, the Taliban first arrested these individuals and then killed them with severe torture. They dumped both bodies somewhere. The intensity of the torture was so extreme that their entire bodies were black, and I personally observed clear signs of beatings¹⁴⁸."

Furthermore, an interviewee stated:

"In Ghor province prison, I witnessed the death of a prisoner. Three brothers, who said they were arrested in Saghar district due to regional conflicts and tortured repeatedly for a month. Finally, they were transferred to Ghor province prison, and the eldest brother, about 60, died after a week¹⁴⁹."

These accounts, and the statements of two other victims, highlight the extreme brutality of the Taliban towards detainees and prisoners, constituting both extrajudicial killings in prison and torture leading to death.

147 Rawadari, Interviewee No 13, 9 April 2025.

148 Rawadari, Interviewee No 13, 9 April 2025.

149 Rawadari, Interviewee No 6, 15 May 2025.

CONSEQUENCES OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

The interviewees in this report stated that detention and torture had profound negative consequences on their physical and mental health, which may persist for the rest of their lives. Victims reported injuries such as brain haemorrhage, deafness, back pain and headaches, feelings of insecurity, depression, suicidal attempts and other psychological problems, loss of sexual ability, cervical spine deviation, broken teeth and leg bones, joint pains, difficulties in sitting and walking, and physical inability to write. We will now examine the consequences of torture, based on direct victim narratives, in two sections: physical harm and psychological harm.

1. Physical Consequences

Twenty-one out of 34 interviewees in this study stated they experienced physical injuries and problems due to severe torture in Taliban prisons.



One victim, a former military staff, recounted:

"My body was black from head to toe. Doctors told me I needed to see a brain specialist. With friends' help, we went to a hospital in Kabul. They X-rayed and CT-scanned my head and said I had a brain haemorrhage. I was hospitalized for 15 days and am still taking medication and under a doctor's care¹⁵⁰."

A woman protester stated:

"As a result of severe torture, my eardrum is torn and damaged. My right index finger is severely injured, and currently, I can't sit for long because my leg and back hurt¹⁵¹."

Similarly, another interviewee, who lost his sexual ability due to severe torture and faces other physical problems, stated:

"One of my ears still hurts terribly, and the doctor told me I need surgery. I also have difficulty walking. The biggest problem I'm still battling is involuntary ejaculation and the loss of my sexual ability¹⁵²."

150 Rawadari, Interviewee No 23, 18 April 2025.

151 Rawadari, Interviewee No 26, 25 April 2025.

152 Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.

2. Psychological Consequences

Twenty-three interviewees reported facing psychological problems after their release from prison due to enduring severe torture. Many cried while recounting their experiences, indicating the deep psychological trauma they suffered. Reported issues include suicidal attempts, depression, severe anxiety, hopelessness about the future, memory loss, anger, isolation, withdrawal, sleep disorders (like fear and screaming in sleep), nightmares, and a loss of interest in life and daily activities.



One interviewee stated:

“When I was released, my mental state was terrible. I had no appetite and screamed at night. I didn’t leave the house for two months because I was afraid that they would arrest me again¹⁵³.”

Similarly, another interviewee stated:

“Although I met with a mental health professional and I take medication, feelings of hopelessness about life and bitter memories of torture in prison still torment me, and I have terrible nightmares at night¹⁵⁴.”

Similarly, another interviewee stated:

“Fear, nightmares, and restlessness are always with me. The tortures I experienced torment my mind and soul every moment, and their effects never leave me. Even my family and children suffer severely from this situation¹⁵⁵.”

PERPETRATORS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Having detailed various forms of torture and ill-treatment based on direct victim narratives in previous sections, we now briefly examine the identity of the perpetrators.

Our research reveals that 25 cases of reported torture—including physical and psychological torture, sexual harassment, and other degrading behaviours—were committed by the GDI. Five cases involved the police, and two involved forces affiliated with the Ministry of Defence. For one individual, GDI and Mol were jointly the alleged perpetrators. In one other individual’s case, it was a local Taliban official. One individual was arrested by the police and then handed over to GDI and GDI was involved in torture. We gathered this information by analysing the narratives of 34 victims interviewed by Rawadari.

153 Rawadari, Interviewee No 26, 25 April 2025.

154 Rawadari, Interviewee No 1, 8 May 2025.

155 Rawadari, Interviewee No 18, 27 April 2025.

The torturers were primarily men, affiliated with the Taliban's intelligence and police departments, operating at mid- to senior levels within these institutions. Notably, three women, arrested for participating in protests, reported being subjected to torture and ill-treatment by women guards in the intelligence and police monitoring facilities. These abuses included threats of stoning, humiliation, and insults.

Some victims recalled their torturers' physical characteristics, job positions, and in some cases, even their names. Their narratives indicate that heads of intelligence departments, intelligence station (hawza) officials, intelligence monitoring facility officials, district intelligence officials, intelligence investigation and interrogation officers, police officials, and lower-ranking intelligence and police officers were direct perpetrators of torture.

A common pattern among victims arrested by the GDI is that torturers often covered their own faces or the victims' eyes. This suggests that perpetrators, aware of the legal consequences of torture, attempted to conceal their identities from victims.

HARASSMENT AFTER RELEASE

Six of the interviewees stated that they faced continued harassment by the GDI after their release from detention. Additionally, 15 others stated they fled the country due to fear of re-arrest and re-torture.



A civil society activist, arrested on charges of coordinating a demonstration, told Rawadari: *"One of the individuals involved in my arrest later tried to contact me via WhatsApp and Facebook. He constantly sent messages asking my whereabouts and activities. Early on, before leaving the country, I felt forced to reply to his messages, fearing the consequences of not doing so. This situation became a form of threat and psychological pressure¹⁵⁶."*

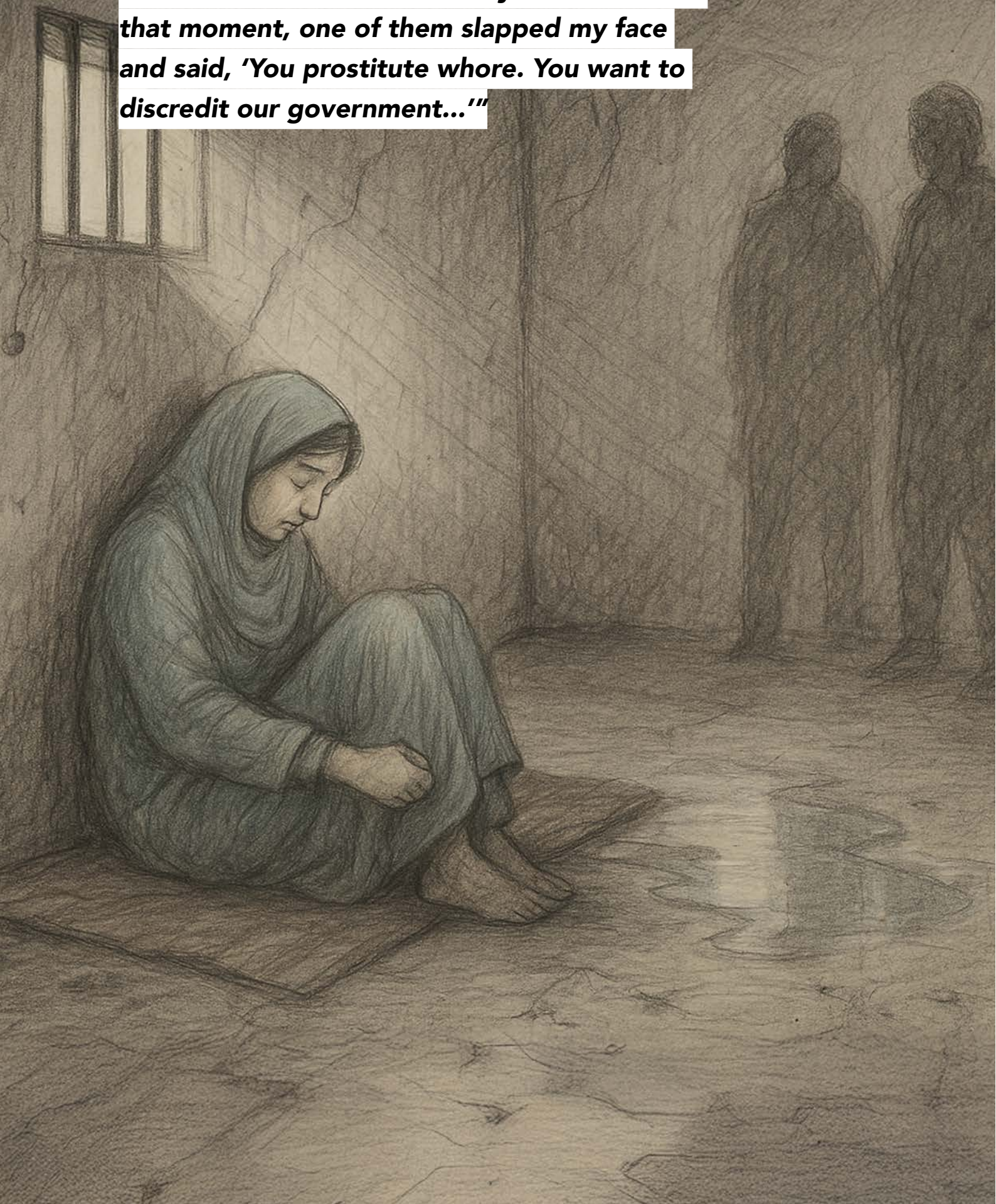
Another interviewee, a human rights defender, stated:

"After my release, local Taliban continued to pursue me. Sometimes they called my brother or a friend, asking about my whereabouts. I moved around secretly... Once, they sent a summons to my house, saying I had to go to the district, but I was in Kabul and didn't go. They also indirectly threatened my brothers¹⁵⁷."

¹⁵⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 24, 26 April 2025.

¹⁵⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 7, 27 April 2025.

"They asked, 'Which country supports you?' I said, 'No country supports me.' We expected at least one or two women in your cabinet. At that moment, one of them slapped my face and said, 'You prostitute whore. You want to discredit our government...'"





Similarly, another victim, whose family members faced repeated and continuous harassment and threats, recounted:

“When I was released, they took my phone number, and later, an intelligence agent texted me, demanding more money. Every week, they would message me, sometimes asking for four thousand dollars, sometimes five thousand, and sometimes ten, fifteen, and twenty thousand dollars. They threatened to re-arrest and torture me if I didn’t pay. I was at my breaking point and had to pay another six or seven thousand dollars. The Taliban also confiscated two houses and three shops, which were my personal property. They have gone to my house several times and demanded money from my children with threats. Now I am deeply worried about my children’s safety and security¹⁵⁸.”

OBSTACLES TO JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The reality is that achieving justice and accountability in Afghanistan currently faces serious challenges and obstacles. A major impediment is the absence of an independent judicial system and oversight bodies with the necessary authority and capacity for impartial investigations into human rights violations. This situation has led to the continuation of various forms of human rights abuses, including torture and ill-treatment. The Taliban’s judicial system not only disregards the principles of fair trial guaranteed by international human rights instruments and previous Afghan laws, but it also actively promotes injustice and a culture of impunity.

However, access to legal counsel at various stages of judicial proceedings, timely appearance in court, and the redress of torture complaints are fundamental principles of a fair trial. Our report’s findings show that the Taliban have extensively violated these principles.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan reported that the lack of legal guarantees, including limited access to legal counsel and non-observance of other fair trial principles, has led to torture and ill-treatment¹⁵⁹. Similarly, the UN Assistance Mission reported approximately 466 cases of torture and ill-treatment in Taliban-controlled prisons between January 2022 and July 31, 2023. However, they are unaware of any instances where police and intelligence monitoring facility officials ordered investigations into these violations or held the perpetrators accountable.

1. Lack of Access to Legal Counsel

The right to legal counsel is a cornerstone of fair trial and a fundamental guarantee for detained individuals. According to Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, anyone facing criminal charges has the right to legal assistance from their chosen counsel. If they cannot

¹⁵⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 13, 9 April 2025.

¹⁵⁹ Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur, Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan, 30 August 2024, P 16

afford a lawyer, the state must appoint one free of charge. The Afghan Constitution also stipulated that all individuals, upon arrest and for self-defence or proving their rights, could appoint legal counsel¹⁶⁰.

Our findings indicate that 27 out of 34 interviewees never accessed legal counsel at any stage of their detention. Only 5 individuals reported limited access to a lawyer, primarily at the end of the investigation phase. Among these, two never had the opportunity for effective meetings or consultations with their lawyer, only seeing each other in court. Two of the 34 respondents were released in a few hours.

The widespread denial of legal counsel significantly contributed to the torture and ill-treatment of victims and facilitated the violation of other fundamental rights.

2. Lack of Access to Court

The timely appearance of detainees before judicial authorities ensures the prevention of arbitrary detention and torture. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that anyone arrested must be brought promptly before a judge or other authorized judicial official for a detention decision and has the right to a trial within a reasonable time or right to release. Afghanistan's 2004 Constitution, following the Civil and Political Rights Convention, emphasized that the accused has the right to be informed of the charges immediately upon arrest and to appear in court within the legally prescribed period.

Our research found that 24 out of 34 interviewees, after enduring torture and ill-treatment, were released from intelligence and police monitoring facilities without appearing in court. Their release came through informal mechanisms like written commitments, personal guarantees, legal documents for homes and shops, cash payments, and weapon surrender, often facilitated by their families and local elders.



One interviewee stated:

"I was released on condition of silence, no further protest against Taliban policies, and not speaking about my detention and prison experience. Both my father and I signed the written commitment¹⁶¹."

Similarly, another interviewee recounted:

"They took my WhatsApp number. We went to another room where about 40 or 50 people who guaranteed me were present. They read the commitment letter stating I was banned from leaving the country and had no right to participate in

¹⁶⁰ Constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Article 31.

¹⁶¹ Rawadari, Interviewee No 8, 15 April 2025.

demonstrations or other anti-Islamic Emirate activities. Then I went to the Shia Commission, where they also took my guarantee. I also paid 400,000 Afghanis (equivalent of 5625 USD) once and 180,000 Afghanis (equivalent of 2,531 USD) another time to the Taliban to be released¹⁶².”

In some cases, the Taliban released victims after receiving large sums of money:

“My family helped my release from prison by paying the forty thousand dollars the Taliban demanded. Some money was at home, and the rest they borrowed from friends and acquaintances. I don’t know which specific local Taliban official took the money, but I know it was paid to the Taliban intelligence directorate¹⁶³.”

Only six victims stated that courts reviewed and decided their cases. Among these, three were acquitted, while the rest received prison sentences and flogging. One victim stated that after enduring various forms of torture, he was finally found innocent and released. The Taliban informed him his arrest resulted from a misunderstanding and coordination issue¹⁶⁴.



Another interviewee, a woman protester, described her trial:

“In the court, they told me I committed no crime and would release me in another session. I was happy. Five days, ten days, then a month passed, but I was still imprisoned. Another month passed, and they took me to court again, sentencing me to one and a half years in prison. They handcuffed me. I screamed and shouted, refusing the verdict, and the case went to the appeals court. They even beat me inside the court. They told my father his daughter had become a Christian and an infidel. Finally, the appeals court told my family they had to agree to conditions, including accepting the 1.5 year sentence, paying a \$5,000 fine, providing three guarantors, pledging not to leave the country, not to protest the Taliban again, and not to speak to media about torture. My family sold the house and gave \$5,000 to the Taliban...¹⁶⁵”

162 Rawadari, Interviewee No 29, 18 April 2025.

163 Rawadari, Interviewee No 13, 9 April 2025.

164 Rawadari, Interviewee No 11, 27 April 2025.

165 Rawadari, Interviewee No 32, 24 May 2025.



Another victim, after eight months of detention and enduring various forms of torture that even broke two of his teeth, stated:

“My trial day arrived. We went before the judge, and after a few questions, he acquitted me. My acquittal was conditional on providing a personal guarantee, a legitimate title deed for a house, licenses for two active shops, and a written commitment signed by my family, pledging not to ‘rebel’ against the Islamic Emirate again¹⁶⁶.”

Taliban courts have, in some instances, issued bizarre sentences. For example, a human rights activist who spent four months in prison told Rawadari that he was sentenced as someone “causing corruption on earth”:

“They said, ‘We give you a sentence of time served, and you must receive 30 lashes of ta’ziri (discretionary punishment) flogging; otherwise, your trial might take months or even years and need confirmation from Kandahar.’ I was forced to accept. Finally, they lashed me with a whip made of leather and metal pieces, causing severe pain¹⁶⁷.”

Another victim stated that due to publishing notes on Facebook criticizing a terrorist attack on an educational centre in West Kabul, the Taliban court sentenced him on charges of national treason:

“The accusations the Taliban judge used to sentence me to two months and 15 days in prison were ‘national treason,’ ‘insulting the Mujahideen,’ ‘having three Facebook accounts,’ and ‘not observing Islamic appearance.’ I protested, but I received an insulting response¹⁶⁸.”

3 - Failure to Address Complaints and Impunity for Torturers

The International Convention Against Torture obliges States Parties to criminalize all forms of torture under their criminal laws and to prescribe appropriate penalties for its perpetrators, including those who participate in and cooperate with torture.

Currently, no effective law criminalizes torture in Afghanistan, nor are there any effective judicial processes for prosecuting torturers. The Taliban have previously suspended the implementation of the constitution, criminal laws, and the anti-torture law.

¹⁶⁶ Rawadari, Interviewee No 21, 21 April 2025.

¹⁶⁷ Rawadari, Interviewee No 5, 27 April 2025.

¹⁶⁸ Rawadari, Interviewee No 6, 15 May 2025.

Consequently, no legal mechanisms exist to prevent torture or ensure fair trial principles. Since Taliban's takeover in 2021, monitoring bodies like the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Attorney General's Office have been disbanded, eliminating legal and oversight structures crucial for monitoring detention facilities, addressing torture-related complaints, and prosecuting perpetrators.

Furthermore, the Taliban do not adhere to their legal responsibilities under the international human rights instruments to which Afghanistan is a party. Therefore, achieving justice for victims and holding torturers accountable is unlikely without political will from the DFA and extensive reforms. Our findings show that the Taliban have not only failed to address torture victims' complaints but, in some cases, tortured and ill-treated them again:



"I complained to a delegation from Kandahar about torture and ill-treatment. Later, the head of intelligence tortured me more because of that complaint¹⁶⁹."

Another interviewee stated:

"The court declared me innocent and released me. My lawyer mentioned my torture in prison, but the judge replied: 'What happened before the court is none of our business'¹⁷⁰."

Similarly, another victim recounted:

"The judge sentenced me to eight months imprisonment. When I told him they had violated my rights and asked if he saw my condition and the marks of torture on my body, he got angry¹⁷¹." This interviewee also mentioned that after four days of interrogation, someone entered his cell with a pen and paper, asking, "Were you tortured?" He replied, "Can't you see my condition? Apart from my two eyes, my whole body is black." The visitor said he was a human rights worker and then asked, "How many guns do you have?"

169 Rawadari, Interviewee No 5, 27 April 2025

170 Rawadari, Interviewee No 19, 1 May 2025.

171 Rawadari, Interviewee No 31, 25 May 2025.

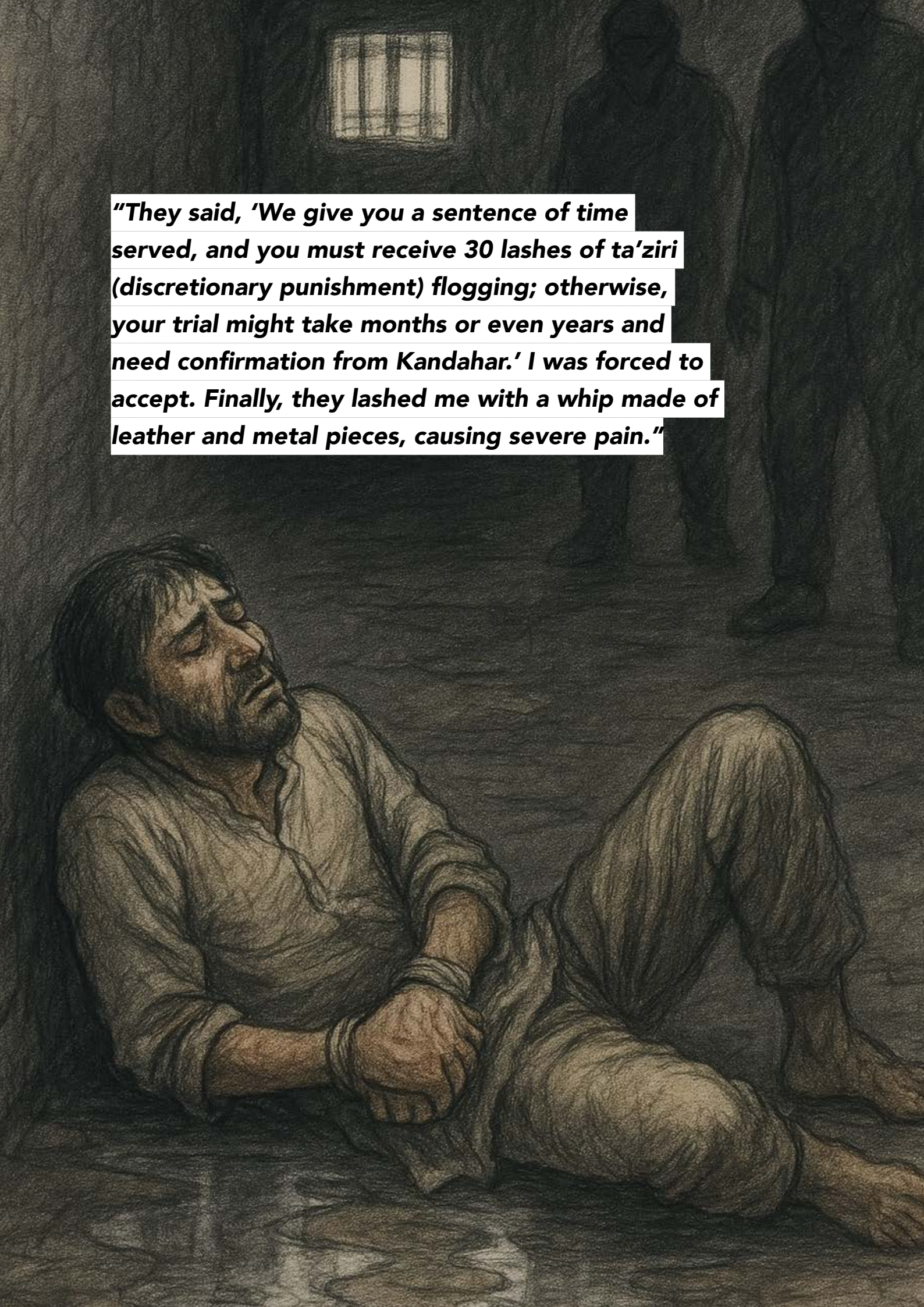


In only one instance, a victim stated that the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) partially addressed his complaint:

“After I was discharged from the hospital, at a friend’s insistence, I complained to the complaints section of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The head of that section called the district intelligence director who had tortured me and asked for information, but he denied torturing me. Later, I learned that the intelligence director of that district had been transferred¹⁷².”

172 Rawadari, Interviewee No 23, 18 April 2025

"They said, 'We give you a sentence of time served, and you must receive 30 lashes of ta'ziri (discretionary punishment) flogging; otherwise, your trial might take months or even years and need confirmation from Kandahar.' I was forced to accept. Finally, they lashed me with a whip made of leather and metal pieces, causing severe pain."



CONCLUSION

Our research findings clearly illustrate that the Taliban have used torture and ill-treatment as tools for suppression, intimidation, punishment, and extracting information and confessions from victims. This situation highlights the ruling group's disregard for minimal standards in treating prisoners and the absence of an effective judicial system that guarantees fair trial principles.

Based on credible victim testimonies, the Taliban have committed various forms of torture and ill-treatment from the moment of arrest until release. Key methods include beatings, nail and tooth extraction, electric shocks, waterboarding, hanging from the ceiling, humiliation, verbal abuse, threats of murder, execution, beheading, stoning, and being buried alive, forced confessions, prolonged interrogations, solitary confinement, ethnic and religious humiliation, sexual harassment, and holding prisoners in inhumane conditions. These actions not only blatantly contradict international human rights instruments, including the International Convention Against Torture, but also demonstrate the extreme oppression and cruelty of the Taliban towards prisoners.

Furthermore, after regaining control of Afghanistan, the Taliban dismantled all effective legal frameworks protecting the fundamental rights of detainees by revoking the constitution and other relevant domestic laws. This has created an environment of absolute freedom for torturers, perpetuating a culture of impunity and lack of accountability.

Our findings also indicate that the torture and ill-treatment inflicted have caused severe and lasting physical and psychological damage to victims, leading to permanent problems in their personal and social lives. Addressing the dire situation in Taliban-controlled detention facilities and preventing further torture and ill-treatment requires urgent action from the de-facto authorities and relevant international organizations and accountability mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the United Nations:

- Given the current lack of national independent bodies to effectively and continuously monitor Taliban-controlled detention facilities, we strongly urge UNAMA to increase the number and frequency of its monitoring visits across all places of detention and ensure that unannounced visits are conducted particularly to the detention facilities of the GDI.
- As this report's findings reveal the widespread and alarming extent of torture and ill-treatment in Afghanistan's detention facilities, we urge the United Nations, particularly the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, to conduct further investigations and documentation, and to share their findings publicly.
- We urge the International Criminal Court to continue its investigation of the situation in Afghanistan and take further concrete steps to hold the perpetrators accountable.
- We call upon the international community to increase diplomatic pressure on the Taliban to ensure their compliance with Afghanistan's international obligations, including the International Convention Against Torture.
- We urgently appeal to the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to victims, including supporting their resettlement and asylum applications.

To the De Facto Authorities:

- We urge the de facto authorities to refrain from further torture, ill-treatment, and human rights violations against prisoners, as these carry international criminal responsibility. They must also facilitate the implementation of previous laws, especially Afghanistan's Anti-Torture Law.
- Afghanistan has acceded to numerous international instruments and treaties that absolutely guarantee freedom from torture. Therefore, we urge the de facto authorities to uphold their legal obligations and responsibilities under these documents to prevent torture and punish its perpetrators.
- The de-facto authorities should prioritize establishing a National Preventive Mechanism in line with Afghanistan's commitments.
- We also urge the de facto authorities to fulfil their legal duties to address the conditions within detention facilities under their control and to facilitate independent and unannounced monitoring of these facilities by relevant international and national organizations,
- We urge the de facto authorities to immediately stop arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture as tools to suppress civil activities and the right to freedom of expression in Afghanistan

