

Ugandans to the rescue



4/13/2011

Living horrors of state torture

Victims reveal hammers, knives, needles, electric shock, metal pipes used in the torture process

Posted by Musa



This picture 1st appeared on our website and now here is the real story

Why don't you shoot me, so I die?" screamed one of the suspects Frank Ssekanjako who had been subjected to severe beatings by the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) operatives to extract a confession from him. The RRU officers were annoyed, they separated Ssekanjako from the other suspects, took him a distance away and asked him: "You want to die with a bullet? No, you will die of beatings." The beatings continued, Ssekanjako stopped making any noise, his eyes were wide open and he lay there motionless. He was dead. Imagine asking a victim how they want to die!!!

Frightened, his co-suspects admitted to the crime of robbery in order to avoid further beating. By the way again such crime were heard of during IDI AMIN's regime but not to this magnitude!

Apparently robbers had broken into a house of a wealthy woman in Makindye suburb in Kampala on August 20, 2010. Holding machetes, they robbed her of property and money. The RRU arrested Ssekanjako, a 22-year-old who was renting a room near the scene of crime, and three others. He was arrested along with three others by the RRU and taken to Kabalagala Police Station. Three days later, three RRU officers collected Ssekanjako and another suspect from the police station saying they wanted to recover the stolen property."

This is part of the horror testimonies of torture the Human Rights Watch, an international human rights body, recorded from 77 former and current detainees of RRU, a dreaded branch of the Uganda Police Force. **RRU is the Police, Sherriff, prosecutor, Jury, Judge and the executioner.**

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The testimonies are contained in the latest Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, "Violence Instead of Vigilance Torture and Illegal Detention by Uganda's Rapid Response Unit" which documented human rights abuses in Uganda between 2009 and 2011.

On March 23, HRW released its 13-month investigation report that pins the RRU on extrajudicial killings, torture, forcing detainees to confess to crimes, illegal and incommunicado detention and theft of the detainees' property. The report narrates some of the horrors under the RRU detention which include the killing of over six people.

Killing of Ssekanjako

The RRU claims Ssekanjako developed stomach pain along the way and they took him to Mulago Hospital. But eyewitnesses said Ssekanjako was badly beaten by the two RRU personnel at the scene of alleged theft as the woman who claimed her property and money had been stolen watched.

When the beating intensified Ssekanjako pleaded with the RRU officers to at least shoot him instead of subjecting him to further torture. They refused. They told him he would instead die of the beating and indeed he did. *How much of a beating might you have taken to give up and ask for death instead?*

"The RRU officers dropped other suspects at Kabalagala police station and took Ssekanjako to Mulago Hospital where Ssekanjako was pronounced dead."

Although the post-mortem report from Mulago says no cause of his death was determined, it confirms that Ssekanjako died of unnatural causes. The pathologist who did the post mortem says Ssekanjako's body had "eight puncture cuts on the right foot, six linear tramline bruising on the back associated with linear cuts, swollen right shoulder, diffuse bruising of the right and left upper arms, three linear abrasions over the left thigh, an abrasion 4 x1 cm over the left elbow, multiple bruising of the left flank, injuries are fresh." These injuries are associated with or inflicted by assault.

Ssekanjako's family has been frustrated in their pursuit of justice. On Ssekanjako's burial, police gave the family Shs500,000 (about \$230) as "compensation" for fuel for transporting his body, and some food. When the death was reported in the press, the police called the family members to tell them that Ssekanjako was a thief and that they should not return to the police. *I can assure you Ssekanjako's family will get real justice and all those who have been denied justice will get it soon*

"Police told me, 'Despite what we did for you, you keep complaining. We don't want to see you again. Every police officer here is waiting for you if you return here. Don't come back.' I took that as a threat. It made me feel that the police thought that my brother deserved to die." **Ssekanjako's brother told the HRW.**

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It is puzzling why then the police offered Shs500,000 to facilitate burial of “a thief” if that’s what they believed Ssekanjako was. The police have also failed to give the family information, documents, or medical evidence related to Ssekanjako’s death.

Some RRU officers Muhammad Kavuma and Ramhadhan Dhikusoka were arrested in connection with Ssekanjako’s death but police have been uncooperative with the family and the investigations seem to have stalled and the Ssekanjako’s family most likely will never get justice.

Killing of Henry Bakasamba

Ssekanjako’s case is not the only one. In May 2010, RRU beat Henry Bakasamba during questioning about the theft of Shs80m (\$34,000) from a foreign exchange bureau. **He died from injuries at the Kireka RRU base** . According to eyewitnesses at the crime scene, Bakasamba was initially arrested by “informants,” who work with police but are not members of the police force. Two employees of the exchange bureau were also arrested after allegedly being implicated by Bakasamba and were taken to Kampala Central Police Station and later to Kireka. One eyewitness spoke of how he saw Bakasamba’s hands and feet tied to a pole and being repeatedly beaten on the joints. He was then taken to a room for interrogation. **BY the way KIREKA has turned into slaughter house!!!**

“I heard people outside saying that the man had died. I was very scared that I would be killed too but we didn’t know what to do,” one of the former inmates says.

Two police officers were reportedly detained, three other RRU agents allegedly evaded arrest. However, it is not clear if anyone was ever charged because the HRW could not find any names in prison records. The case files of RRU officers in courts of law that police provided to HRW did not include this case. Police did not reply to the HRW question in a letter to the Inspector General of Police about the action police had taken regarding Bakasamba’s death.

After Bakasamba’s death, other suspects in the case were released without any charge of robbery. One source within government with knowledge of this case told HRW that it had been mishandled by police who sought to cover up RRU’s involvement in the death.

The killings in Kyengera

In January 2010, four people were shot dead in public on the Masaka Road in Kyengera, outside the city. James Angulu, Jude Oceli, retired Lieutenant Kiiza, and retired Warrant Officer Musanje were shot dead by RRU officers. The police later said the suspects were trying to rob a supermarket and were being trailed by plain clothes RRU operatives. The police claim the deceased first shot at the RRU who returned fire killing them instantly. However the police did not mention the name of the supermarket which was allegedly about to be robbed nor did they

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inform the management of the supermarket. Multiple eyewitnesses accounts contradict the police claims.

According to HRW a man, who runs a shop nearby, said he saw a vehicle coming from the direction of Kampala, “and I saw a man near me, shooting his gun at the vehicle, deflating the tires. When the four men jumped out of the car, the man shot them all. I read in the papers later about an attempt to rob the market, but that’s not true. There was no exchange of bullets. As soon as the guys came out, they were shot dead. Those policemen with guns quickly took away the dead bodies, and the towing vehicle came and took away the car. The whole circus didn’t take much time.”

Another resident said: “No, no one should tell lies. They were being trailed and the chance to kill them was in front of the supermarket. This is a story that is well known among the people of Kyengera.”

Other Killings

Many other people who had at some time been held in RRU detention told Human Rights Watch they had witnessed fellow detainees die, but did not know the full names of those killed.

Former RRU detainees, whom HRW interviewed individually, in different locations, said RRU officers in Kireka beat to death a detainee called “Okello” in May 2010. Okello had been arrested for allegedly stealing money and was beaten over two days.

Other former detainees said that at least six other detainees were also killed. HRW says in its report that a detainee said he saw his co-detainee killed by RRU in Mabira Forest in July 2009 as he was being transferred from Soroti military barracks. Another RRU detainee died in 2009 from injuries of being sodomized with a gun. Stories of extrajudicial killings in RRU detention are endless.

Tools of torture

The 77 interviewees said that during the torture process, the RRU use repetitive beating on the joints like knees, elbows, shoulders, ankles, and wrists over many days while the victims are handcuffed in stress positions. RRU personnel beat detainees with various objects, including batons, sticks, bats, wooden clubs, metal pipes, padlocks, glass soda bottles, and table legs. In three instances, detainees said they received electric shocks.



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Detainees in eastern, western, and central Uganda described the same methods of beatings during interrogations: suspects are frequently made to sit with their legs in front of them, bent at the knees, with their hands handcuffed under their legs. Sometimes suspects are placed in this position around a pole. They are then beaten repeatedly on the joints. One former detainee said:

“I saw many people being beaten in that position, where they tie your hands under your knees around the veranda pole. You can spend all day in that position. When you are inside, you can hear the crying of people throughout the building.”

In some instances, RRU operatives take turns to beat suspects. There were usually two shifts for beatings, one in the morning and again at night. A former RRU detainee described torture he suffered in 2007: “They tortured me several times. They would take me from my cell and take me behind the offices. Many would take part in torturing. There were five consecutive days of them beating me. At night, around 11 p.m., and in the morning, around 10 a.m. They tied cloth on my mouth and handcuffed me so that I wouldn’t obstruct the beating or bring my hands down. My hands were tied up. They used broken timber that had four corners, like a table leg, to beat me.”

Victims of beatings said they had difficulty walking or lifting heavy objects, sometimes for many months, after the torture.

Three persons arrested in 2010 in western Uganda each said that an RRU operative called Amoni used electric shock on them during questioning. It is not clear whether “Amoni” is a pseudonym. “Amoni” would use a hammer to strike a suspect’s spine and a knife to cut his back. Another individual in eastern Uganda who had been on remand for a year said that an RRU agent named Kizza cut his stomach and thighs with a knife. The Human Rights Watch researchers saw the scars on his body.

The RRU hunger to torture detainees could even not stop at the sight of a woman. According to HRW report RRU agents forced needles under fingernails of female detainees during interrogations. “I cannot recall the number of times they pierced my nails My nails were destroyed. They were black, swollen, and painful. The needles were inserted under the nail, on both my hands and feet. They pierced every nail,” one of the women said.

A former suspect at RRU now on remand sums up the torture ordeal: “The beatings started at 9 a.m. and went until 3 p.m. That RRU man got out a baton and beat me in the knee joints. He asked me to tell him where my boss is, saying that we rob together. He beat my joints for hours. I was seated and handcuffed. When he was not satisfied with my answers, he took a hammer and hit me on my back with it. He hit me on my backbone, from the bottom up to my shoulders. I said that the other man was a thief because I was in so much pain. He said, “If you don’t tell the truth, I’ll kill you....If you don’t admit you know this man, we’ll kill you.”

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One mind boggling question comes up; why would the police torture suspects to extract information from them? Don't they have professional methods of getting useful information from suspects without brutalizing them? Is it incompetence of the police detectives or it's sheer corruption where the RRU are paid by aggrieved parties to torture suspects?

The HRW says police's relies on tips from untrained informants to make arrests without investigating first. In most cases the detainees are released without any charge after being tortured which implies lack of evidence to implicate them or a case of mistaken identity.

Upon recruitment all police officers undergo law enforcement (traffic, public order management) and crime detection courses during their nine month training. On passing out the recruits are randomly posted to the different police sections like mobile, anti-riot, traffic, detective, communication, and VIP protection police among others. Those who join CID are further trained on job. Fresh CID police detectives undergo a three or four or six month induction training depending on availability of manpower. This induction is what passes as a form of specialized training in crime detection and investigation. Thereafter they are deployed as CID officers. One wonders if such brief training can produce competent crime detectives.

Besides, RRU comprises soldiers, policemen and ad-hoc operatives untrained in law enforcement just like its predecessor Operation Wembley. "Over half of the original operatives affiliated with Wembley remain active in RRU, although it is unclear precisely how many," report says.

Only the agency's name and command have changed but its character remains the same. The report says the membership of RRU could be one of the main reasons for unending human rights violations at the unit. The unit is a legacy of the dreaded 2002 Operation Wembley which routed out anyone perceived to be an armed robber. Members of Operation Wembley were drawn out of the army, military intelligence agencies and the police's CID.

"You go to police and expect vigilance and instead you get violence," Sekanjako's brother told Human Rights Watch.

State torture with impunity

What is more puzzling is that such torture stories have been exposed by various human rights organizations but the security forces have continued to commit the same abuses unbothered. The public is even wondering whether it's even worth to continue writing human rights reports every year when they will not make any change.

The government continues to deny that its security agencies torture people.

"Unfortunately, despite government officials' commitments to investigate and make changes to eradicate brutality and detention without charge, evidence of abuses

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continues to mount,” says the report. Police spokesperson, Judith Nabakoba, said it is not unusual for HRW to come up with such a report arguing that its methodology is questionable.

The report argues that whereas Uganda is boasts as a country that respects human rights by becoming a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), participating in African Union (AU) and UN peacekeeping missions abroad as well as sending some police officers abroad for training, the government still fails to protect human rights domestically or to take significant steps to address the problem of systemic and pervasive torture and prolonged illegal detention.

Theft and extortion

The HRW notes that family members of the detained suspects were reportedly contacted by RRU operatives demanding money for their relatives’ ransom. “A detainee was promised release if he paid Shs6,000,000 or that the beatings would stop if he paid Shs100,000,” the report quotes one of the former RRU detainees

www.independent.co.ug/reports/special-report/4052-living-horrors-of-state-torture

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State of Pain: Torture in Uganda: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2004/03/28/state-pain-0>

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