



Rights Group Accuses Ugandan Police of Torture and Killings

Posted by Musa

KAMPALA, Uganda — The Ugandan government has engaged in torture, illegal detention and extrajudicial killings of its citizens, according to a report released on Wednesday.

The report, by [Human Rights Watch](#), focuses on the activities of an agency known as the Rapid Response Unit, a branch of the [Uganda](#) police service created to tackle violent crime. The unit has also become an ally of the United States in combating terrorism. Most recently, it helped investigate the terrorist [attacks in Uganda's capital](#), Kampala, during the World Cup last year, in which more than 70 people died.

[The report](#) says that members of the unit, called the R.R.U., have repeatedly broken the law. "Since the unit was established, R.R.U. officers and affiliated personnel have carried out arrests for a wide range of crimes, from petty theft to terrorism," it said.

The Ugandan government declined to comment on the report.

Of 77 people interviewed, [Human Rights Watch](#) said, 60 said they had been tortured by members of the unit. Common abuses included beatings on wrists, ankles, knees and elbows while suspects were handcuffed in stress positions.

"R.R.U. personnel beat detainees with batons, sticks, bats, metal pipes, padlocks, table legs and other objects," the report said. "Suspects often said they were forced to sign confessions under duress following torture."

According to the report, members of the response unit committed six extrajudicial killings in 2010; some people were beaten to death, and some were shot, including one person who was handcuffed when he was shot.

Others were imprisoned without being charged, the group said. Some suspects were transported in the trunks of unmarked cars, or severely beaten, the report said.

Ugandans to the rescue



3/27/2011

Mustafa Ssendege, 35, a former security guard, was detained with two others by three officers from the unit after a robbery at a house he was guarding.

After two nights in a police station, the three men were taken back to the house, where they were tied up and beaten repeatedly with metal pipes while the officers told them to confess, the report said. One man, Frank Ssekanjako, finally collapsed.

"He said, 'Instead of beating me, why don't you just shoot me to die,' " Mr. Ssendege recalled, according to the report. "And the officer said, 'No, you will die from the beatings.' "

Human Rights Watch described the response unit as the "preferred unit" for those seeking arrests or confessions "by any means."

"In cases we looked at by R.R.U., suspects were beaten until they confessed, paraded before journalists and dubbed hard-core criminals and then put on trial before military officers," said Maria Burnett, a researcher for the group in Uganda.

The report's findings could be a cause for concern for the United States, which is a strong ally of Uganda and a partner in trying to counter emerging terrorist threats in East Africa.

"The United States continues to encourage Ugandan security services to respect human rights and the rule of law in pursuit of justice," the American Embassy in Kampala said in a statement on the report. "We routinely work with the military and law enforcement to enhance the professionalization of these services and will continue to do so."

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: March 23, 2011

An earlier version of this article misstated the source of a statement made by Mustafa Ssendege about an assault he says he experienced. He made the statement in an interview with a Times reporter, not in a Human Rights Watch report.

www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/world/africa/24uganda.html?_r=1&ref=uganda

Ugandans to the rescue



3/27/2011