

Torture report reveals German authorities' brutal methods during deportations

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In the first quarter of 2019, more than 5,600 people were deported from Germany. According to warnings from refugee workers, a collective deportation to Afghanistan could take place again next week. The brutal methods used by the police are evident in the recent report of the European Anti-Torture Committee.

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) is a body of the Council of Europe composed of elected independent experts, including doctors and lawyers, but also police officers.

In a May 9 report, the committee presents the observations made by three of its staff members during a deportation flight from Munich to Afghanistan on August 14, 2018, involving 46 Afghans between the ages of 18 and 40, of whom 21 had previously been held in detention pending deportation. The charter flight from Munich to Kabul was guarded by more than 100 police officers, i.e., more than two per deported person.

The CPT team observed the arrival and flight preparation at Munich Airport, the boarding process, the six-hour flight and the handover of those affected in Kabul. The methods and processes witnessed are shocking.

The report says, "In the course of the return flight on 14 August 2018, coercive measures were applied by the Federal Police to two returnees who attempted to forcefully resist their return." One of the two, who refused to sit on the plane, was particularly mistreated.

As the report describes in officialese, the individual became "agitated, started shouting and hitting out in all directions, and attempted to stand up. The two escorts seated on either side of him attempted to keep him seated by holding his arms; they were supported by a back-up team of four escorts, three of whom took up positions behind his seat. One of these escort officers put his arm around the returnee's neck from behind and used his other hand to pull the returnee's nose upwards thus enabling his colleague to insert a bite protection into the returnee's mouth."

Shortly thereafter, another policeman pulled "the returnee's head down onto an adjacent seat and placing his knee on the returnee's head in order to exert pressure and gain compliance while the returnee's hands were tied behind his back with a Velcro strap. Another escort officer applied pressure with his thumb to the returnee's temple. A second Velcro strap was applied below the returnee's knees to tie his legs. A helmet was placed on the returnee's head, additional Velcro straps were applied to his arms

and legs ... A sixth escort officer knelt on the returnee's knees and upper legs, using his weight to keep the returnee seated. After some 15 minutes, this sixth escort officer gripped the returnee's genitals with his left hand and repeatedly squeezed them for prolonged periods to gain the returnee's compliance to calm down."

Violence was also used against a second Afghan man. The report states he had "attempted to self-harm and commit suicide on the day of the return operation, by cutting the underside of the left forearm and by swallowing medication. He was treated at a local hospital," whereupon he was handcuffed and dragged off to be deported.

During the transport to the airport, he is said to have "attempted to self-harm again, including by re-opening his wounds." During the "full physical search" in the terminal he became seriously agitated. "Further, the wounds on his left forearm had re-opened, requiring the medical doctor to dress them." On arrival in Kabul, he was "immobilised and carried out of the aircraft by a team of up to seven escort officers."

As the report shows, deportations are being enforced using major force, coercive measures such as handcuffs, hand and foot restraints and "body cuffs." These are people who are obviously already in a terrible mental condition.

The brutal way they are arrested undoubtedly contributes to their trauma. It is common practice for the police to violently drag people out of their beds at night, tear them out of their usual environment and deport them while they are completely unprepared.

The 25 Afghans, who had remained free until their deportation, did not learn about their impending repatriation until the day the police "individually apprehended [them] at their places of residence."

The report says, "Usually, the pick-up occurred in the early morning and was carried out by one or more police patrols consisting of two police officers. Some returnees told the delegation that they were not given sufficient time to prepare for their removal while others were picked up during the night. For instance, several persons complained that they could not collect all their personal belongings and documents; another person could not inform his employer about his situation."

One of those affected had already received notice of deportation five years earlier, in September 2013. Although his entire life situation had changed since then, he was detained without warning

and deported. The report only makes a passing reference to this particularly scandalous case.

Before the flight, the anti-torture committee was also able to witness the preparation, pick-up and transport of six prisoners from the Eichstätt facility in Bavaria. Conditions in this facility, which has only recently been turned into a detention centre, appear to be worse than in prison. As reported, the men there did not even have one hour of outdoor exercise per day. All six Afghans were only informed of their imminent deportation just prior to their departure.

One of the six complained to the committee that he had not been given the opportunity to contact a lawyer throughout his detention, and he had been forbidden to make phone calls at all. Others said that they had no opportunity to inform relatives or others about their arrival in Afghanistan. The Delegation learned from several “returnees” that they had “not been able to access their bank account to collect their savings and had not been informed on how they could subsequently access these funds.”

The collection, transportation to Munich, the searches and the hours-long wait can only be described as torture. According to the report, “Upon their arrival at Munich Airport, all returnees were initially taken to a secured parking area, where they had to wait for up to several hours inside the transport vehicles,” some of them were permanently tied up. “Most detainees were not provided with food or water.” These were men who had been “apprehended in the early morning but had not received any food and water since.”

The medical examination is obviously a farce. Theoretically, a person who has a “life-threatening or serious illness” cannot be deported. Prior to deportation, a medical check-up is required to rule out signs of health problems or risks such as “acute injury, contagious disease or suicide risk.” As the present cases show, the state authorities simply ignore this.

While an acutely suicidal person was returned to the psychiatric hospital from which she should never have been taken, three more vulnerable people were forced onto the flight. All three were said to have “attempted suicide or threatened suicide in the days before or on the day of the deportation.”

Another man from the Büren detention centre in North Rhine-Westphalia was considered fit to travel, although he had a “compressed fracture of a lumbar vertebra as a result of a fall from a significant height, when he attempted to jump out of the window to escape police at the time of his apprehension.” His lumbar vertebra had been provisionally treated in a hospital and he survived the flight only by lying down and in great pain. While his medical record notes he would “need a further medical consultation in order to remove the stitches and, later on, the internal treatment,” it is doubtful whether this will be possible for him in Afghanistan.

Again, in principle, the authorities are obliged to allow a doctor on the spot check whether those being deported are fit to travel. However, the Commission’s findings suggest that there were no independent local physicians on hand and that the areas used for the medical examination were inadequately equipped.

The conditions are said to be “not conducive to establishing a proper patient-doctor relationship.” The police assigned to the “returnees” (up to three officers per person!) were present

throughout the medical examinations, and the doctors were employees of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). The medical examination took place “in two areas within the departure hall, which were visually separated from the view of other persons by temporary partition panels.” The areas were “inadequately equipped: they contained no examination bed or wash basin and only had a chair and a high desk.”

It is clear from the report that the deportation practice of the BAMF and the German government is in direct contradiction to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) guidelines. In particular, “UNHCR considers that, given the current security, human rights and humanitarian situation, the possibility for persecuted groups of persons to move to another safe region within Afghanistan (i.e., an internal flight alternative) is generally not available in Kabul.”

However, the anti-torture experts are not concerned with condemning the deportations themselves. As they write, the main purpose of their visit was “to examine the treatment of foreign nationals during a removal operation by air.” Their report is sympathetic and full of understanding for the “difficult” situation of the German government and the authorities and police. It is extremely reserved and written in an almost servile tone.

The report’s authors emphasize several times that the cooperation of the Federal Police and the German authorities was “excellent” and that the police had treated the returnee “professionally and respectfully.” Improvements are urged only in very gentle, weak expressions, “In a more general perspective, it would be desirable...,” etc.

Nowhere does this Anti-Torture Commission use the term “torture” to refer to processes such as impairing breathing or squeezing the genitals. Nevertheless, the report fills every reader with horror.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) rejects this shameful treatment of refugees with disgust. It concerns people who have come to Germany because they are seeking protection from war and persecution, the products, above all, of Great Power intervention. The methods used today against refugees and immigrants will be used tomorrow against all workers.

The SGP demands the end to deportations and the closure of all deportation and detention centres. In its manifesto for the European elections—“Against nationalism and war! For socialism!”—the SGP explains, “We defend the right to asylum and the right of all workers to live and work in the country of their choice. The working class cannot allow itself to be divided. To defend their own rights, workers must show solidarity with refugees and carry out a common struggle against exploitation and war.”



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