

'Torture in Iraq worse' than during Saddam regime

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Torture in Iraq may be worse now than it was under the regime of Saddam Hussain, the United Nations' chief anti-torture expert said on Thursday, describing a situation where militias, terrorist groups, government forces and others disregard rules on the humane treatment of prisoners.

"What most people tell you is that the situation as far as torture is concerned now in Iraq is totally out of hand," said Manfred Nowak, the global body's special investigator on torture.

"The situation is so bad many people say it is worse than it has been in the times of Saddam Hussain."

Nowak, an Austrian law professor, was in Geneva to present a report on detainee conditions at the US prison in Guantanamo Bay, as well as to brief the UN Human Rights Council, the global body's top rights watchdog, on the situation of torture in countries around the world.

He said that some allegations of torture in Iraq he received were undoubtedly credible.

Government forces were among the perpetrators, Nowak added, citing "very serious allegations of torture within the official Iraqi detention centres".

"You have terrorist groups, you have the military, you have police, you have these militias. There are so many people who are actually abducted, seriously tortured and finally killed," Nowak told reporters at the UN's European headquarters.

"It's not just torture by the government. There are much more brutal methods of torture you'll find by private militias."

Nowak has yet to make an official visit to Iraq, and said such a mission would not be feasible as long as the security situation was so dangerous. He based his comments on interviews with people during a visit to Amman, Jordan and other sources.

"You find these bodies with very heavy and very serious torture marks," he said.