

Report: Egyptian cleric allegedly abducted by CIA recounts torture in Egypt

The Associated Press

An Egyptian cleric who was allegedly kidnapped by the CIA in Milan in 2003 said he was tortured with electric shocks, left in a cell where rats crawled on him and threatened with rape when he was taken to Egypt, an Italian newspaper reported Thursday.

Corriere della Sera said Osama Moustafa Hassan Nasr, also known as Abu Omar, gave an affidavit to the Milan prosecutors who have been investigating the alleged abduction. The Milan prosecutor's office confirmed they had received such a document but would not divulge details of its contents.

Nasr, an Egyptian cleric and terrorist suspect who was living in Milan, was allegedly abducted from a Milan street in February 2003. Prosecutors say Nasr was flown via the joint U.S.-Italian Aviano air base and Germany to Egypt, where he says he was tortured.

Italy granted Nasr political asylum in 2001. He was also under investigation here for suspicion of involvement in international terrorism at the time of his disappearance.

He is currently being held at a police station in Alexandria, Egypt. A reporter for Corriere said he did not know how the affidavit had been smuggled out of the Egyptian prison, but said that apparently it was given to Milan prosecutors by an Egyptian contact in Milan.

The operation is believed to have been part of the CIA's "extraordinary rendition" program in which terrorism suspects are transferred to third countries where some are allegedly subjected to torture.

Nasr said that when he arrived in Egypt, he was put in a tiny cell with no light. He said he was tortured "with electric shocks," punched, slapped and forced to walk on one foot with his hands tied, Corriere reported.

He was questioned about his life outside Egypt and shown pictures of fellow Egyptians and other North Africans living in Italy.

"The questioning lasted seven months, until Sept. 14, 2003, but it seemed like seven years," he wrote, according to the Milan-based daily.

Nasr said at that point he was transferred to another building, where he was kept for another half-year.

"When I asked for the bathroom, I was told it was my cell," Nasr reportedly wrote in the document. "The cell was airless, beetles and rats crawled on my body."

"The guards stripped me naked, threatened to rape me," said Nasr, who went on to describe what he said was other physical abuse and torture, apparently performed by Egyptians.

Nasr said he was forced to lie on a wet mattress connected to electric wires, with his hands tied behind his back and somebody sitting on a chair on his back. He said his genitals were squeezed.

Italian prosecutors say the operation taking Nasr to Egypt was conducted by CIA agents with assistance from Italian agents. They are expected to seek indictments soon of 26 Americans and several Italian intelligence officials.

The prosecutors have also recently renewed their request for the extradition of the 26 Americans to the center-left government headed by Premier Romano Prodi, after the previous Cabinet led by Silvio

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Berlusconi decided against forwarding the request.

All but one of the Americans are believed to be CIA agents, including former station chiefs in Rome and Milan. The 26th has been identified as a U.S. Air Force officer stationed at the time at Aviano air base near Venice.

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