



Dear Editor,

We are writing to raise our strongest objections to the article by Matthew Cassel entitled “Autopsy finds torture behind Bahrain drowning”, and his presentation of the findings of a so-called “independent” autopsy as fact. This comes as just the latest in Al Jazeera English’ long series of biased articles, often acquired through unprofessional methods and unethical behavior on the part of your journalists.

In this latest case, the findings of the “undercover autopsy” seem to be largely based on conjecture, with many of the findings little more than an educated guess as opposed to scientific fact. Dr. Fincanci came into Bahrain on a tourist visa working for an organization (the International Rehabilitation Council on Torture or IRCT) whose mandate is to identify and highlight torture victims. She conducted her examination in a small room located at the cemetery where the body was being prepared for burial, lacking the proper equipment, properly trained assistants, and the appropriately outfitted medical facility. It is clear that this is not the suitable circumstance for a thorough autopsy, which the doctor freely admitted.

Additionally, the second autopsy’s conclusion that Mr. Yousif Ahmed Abbas Mohammed’s death was “unnatural, and [a result of] forced drowning” apparently relies solely on his family testimony that he had been a competent swimmer, neglecting the fact that area is well known for being dangerous to swimmers and that his unfortunate drowning was not the only one in that area, including one in the last month.

Upon receiving the report from the family’s lawyer, the Public Prosecution immediately contacted the original Medical Examiner assigned to the case; provided him with a copy of the report and gave him three days to prepare for questioning and clarification regarding the conflicting reports. The Medical Examiner reviewed his report late Thursday afternoon (17 May 2012) with members of the Public Prosecution, showing the original autopsy photos and answering questions.

He showed extensive pictures of the foot, leg, and arm which Dr. Fincanci claimed showed “obvious” evidence torture and mistreatment. The feet did not show any injuries; the legs showed slight peeling of the skin in a few places as a result of the extensive exposure to the sun and seawater for several days; and the arm showed discolored areas where the skin had sustained injuries slightly mimicking burns due to exposure to the elements.

Moreover, evidence of white parasite eggs were visible on the neck area and helped to establish the time the corpse was in the water. These eggs would not be visible or present to that extent on January 13th unless the body had been in the water for a minimum of 24 hours. Since the family reported the deceased went missing on January 11th the timeline indicates he drowned soon after he was reported as missing.

In the course of an autopsy, the Medical Examiner is under explicit instructions to investigate any injuries are suspected to be the result of any form of mistreatment. Therefore the examiner made two incisions where there was discoloration of the skin; one in the upper arm, the other on the forearm. Both incisions revealed no torn or damaged tissue or clots underneath the skin to indicate injury. The first was a result of decomposition and the other was a result skin burns from the unnaturally long exposure to the sun. Also of note is the fact that the autopsy did not reveal defensive wounds of any kind or anything that would indicate he was restrained in any way.

The claim that the family was prevented from seeing the body is untrue. The body was found on 13 January 2012 and under such unusual circumstances, the Public Prosecution ordered that an autopsy be conducted. Later that day, after the completion of the medical report, the family was free to receive the body. However, the family refused to accept the body and requested that another independent autopsy be conducted. It is worth noting that, according to members of the Public Prosecution, that some members of the family cited post-autopsy



marks and incisions as being evidence of torture. They were corrected on that fact but, nevertheless, they insisted on not receiving the body. The second autopsy and the burial took place on the 21 January 2012.

At this point, and in the sincere desire to get to the truth, the Public Prosecution has questioned the family's lawyer and requested a meeting with Dr. Fincanci so she can present any evidence she claims to have. More information on this case and the first autopsy is available Bahrain's News Agency's website, and the press release dated May 17th.

We continue to desire a cooperative professional working relationship with your organization and are requesting that you publish this response in full as an official rebuttal to the outrageous claims based upon little more than conjecture raised by Dr. Fincanci in your original article.

Kind regards,

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