



Tortured then killed by British forces: fate of Cypriot rebels in 1950s revealed

Shocking new evidence emerges on the deaths of 14 fighters at the hands of occupying UK military during the Cyprus Emergency

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At least 14 Cypriots were tortured then murdered by UK forces during an armed uprising in the late 1950s, according to newly unearthed evidence that raises fresh questions over another shocking chapter of Britain's colonial history.

Testimony from British veterans and Cypriot rebel fighters, along with postmortem and morgue records, as well as previously undisclosed material from Cypriot archives, suggest that the victims died after being interrogated by UK officers. The dead, all men aged between 17 and 37, were arrested on suspicion of being part of the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters, a paramilitary organisation known as EOKA, which orchestrated a guerrilla campaign to overthrow British control in Cyprus.

Photographs from the Cyprus National Archives corroborate signs of torture on their bodies. In some cases, the images appear to show mutilation of the genitals.

A witness to one of the deaths said: "I saw the soldiers pulling Nicos [Georgiou] out of his cell, almost unconscious, with foam coming out

of his mouth. He was making an awful sound like a lion growling as he lay dying. They let him die on the cement outside."

Although claims that the British military used torture during their occupation of Cyprus have circulated for years, it is the first time that UK forces, including its intelligence services, are accused of a campaign of extrajudicial killings during the 1955 to 1959 uprising.

Lessons from Kenya

While the Cypriot uprising was under way, 2,500 miles due south, Britain was embroiled in another bloody campaign.

The Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, which began in 1952 and ran for eight years, has been exposed as one of the most unpalatable episodes of British imperial history. Its suppression led to systematic violence, cover-ups, and about 1.5 million Kenyans held in detention camps or guarded villages. The east African uprising and the violence in Cyprus share numerous similarities. However, the UK government has

In 2019, the UK government paid £1m damages to 33 Cypriots who alleged they were tortured by British forces. Among them was a girl, 16 at the time, who said she was repeatedly raped by soldiers. Although the government said the payout was not "any admission of liability", the fresh details will sharpen scrutiny over the true extent of atrocities committed during the campaign to end colonial rule on the Mediterranean island.

recognised that Kenyans were tortured and "sincerely regrets" the abuses.

The Foreign Office has not done the same with Cyprus and maintains that "the passage of time means it is no longer possible to establish all of the facts with certainty".

Kenyans tortured by British colonial forces have received payouts totalling £20m, with the British government unveiling a monument in Nairobi as a "symbol of reconciliation". No memorial has been offered to Cyprus.

The new claims feature in a book, *14 Crimes of Empire*, published in Greek, which investigates the circumstances behind the deaths of the 14 men.

Elina Stamatiou, the Cypriot author who spent three years investigating the deaths, said the UK government needed to acknowledge its role in their fate. "Justice must be served. I also think that an official apology to the families of these victims would be very important, even if it comes 65 years later. The families' wounds are still open," she said.

In what was known as the Cyprus emergency, EOKA launched an insurgency against British authorities. In response, Cyprus was flooded with thousands of British soldiers in an ultimately futile attempt to crush the island's hopes of independence. Some 371 British soldiers died, compared with around 90 EOKA fighters.

Among them was Georgios Christoforou, 18, who was arrested in the city of Paphos in 1958. Fellow detainees witnessed him being escorted into a British interrogation room and emerging with his "face covered with blood and he could not walk". One recalled "moaning and noises" coming from the room and later heard Christoforou screaming.