

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Egypt: Killings of border crossers must stop

Amnesty International has written to Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak this week urging him to end the use of lethal force against African migrants attempting to cross Egypt's borders into Israel.

The organization has called on the Egyptian authorities to end abuses against Sub-Saharan migrants who continue to be killed, imprisoned and forcibly returned to countries where they are at risk of serious human rights violations, in its latest overview of the situation which was published today.

According to Amnesty International's count, 25 people have been shot and killed trying to cross the Egyptian border into Israel since mid-2007. Nineteen of them were shot dead between January and August 2008 in 16 separate incidents in which tens of others were injured.

More than 1,300 civilians have been tried by an Egyptian military court on a charge of "attempting to exit unlawfully the Egyptian eastern border". To date, none of those tried have been allowed access to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representatives in Egypt despite the fact that many are considered to be refugees or asylum-seekers in need of international protection.

In June 2008, up to 1,200 Eritreans were forcibly returned from Egypt to their country of origin, where they face the risk of torture and other serious human rights violations. This was done in complete contradiction to UNHCR guidelines calling on all governments not to forcibly return refugees and asylum-seekers, including rejected asylum-seekers, to Eritrea. Many of those forcibly returned had fled from Eritrea to avoid indefinite military service or because of religious persecution against Christians. -

Following their return, most of the men have been detained by the Eritrean authorities in military training camps at Wia.

Amongst other things, Amnesty International is calling for the Egyptian authorities to:

Instruct security forces not to use firearms or other lethal force except when strictly necessary;

Cease all forcible returns of Eritreans in line with UNHCR guidelines and cease all forcible returns of people to all countries where they face human rights violations in line with Egypt's obligations under international human rights and refugee law;

Stop trying civilians in military courts in breach of international standards of fair trial;

Ensure that migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are not detained for migration control purposes and that detention is only permissible when the authorities can demonstrate, on individual basis, that it is necessary and proportionate and is used for a legitimate purpose under international law.

Note to editors:

Amnesty International experts are available for interviews in English, French and Arabic.

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