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Unrest continues in Egypt claiming more lives Amnesty International specialist available for comment

Violent clashes between protesters and security forces have claimed at least 38 lives in Port Said.

Amnesty International researcher Diana Eltahawy is in Egypt and has collected testimony that points to the use of excessive force by the security forces as unrest continues.

She said: "It's quite clear from the testimony I've gathered that security forces have been guilty of excessive force including the use of firearms when lives have not been directly in danger.

"The culture of impunity that has built up in Egypt over decades remains and we are calling for full, independent and thorough investigations to bring those who committed crimes to justice."

Now back in Cairo, Diana Eltahawy is available for interview.

Contact: The Amnesty International Press Office (+44 20 7413 5566, Email: press@amnesty.org, Twitter: @amnestypress)

Timeline of testimony gathered in Port Said by Amnesty International

26 January

Eyewitnesses reported that, upon hearing the Cairo court decision referring cases of 21 defendants from Port Said to the Grand Mufti to ratify death sentences, thousands of angry defendants' relatives, members of the Port Said Ultras football fan club and other supporters who were gathered in the vicinity of Port Said's General Prison, including on Mohamed Ali Street, rushed towards the Prison.

According to some of those present at the scene, a small minority of protesters were carrying firearms and others threw stones and Molotov cocktails. Eyewitnesses reported that security forces responded immediately with heavy use of tear gas and firearms and that at about 11:00 armoured vehicles drove around the vicinity twice shooting at random.

Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that security forces were shooting from the rooftops of buildings. According to most accounts, security forces present at the scene included, police, riot police and special forces.

A woman told Amnesty International that, in the morning of 26 January, her cousin, a local football player, Tamer Awad Al-Fakhla, was going to a sports club behind the prison when he was fatally shot in the neck.

Sami Mohamed Ali told Amnesty International that his 17-year-old son, Ahmed, a high school student and activist, was shot in the mouth, when standing across from the Prison and that another man, Mohamed Sami, was fatally shot in the back three times as he was trying to help Ahmed to get to an ambulance.

A local tissue seller using a wheelchair, Amr Ibrahim, 24, told Amnesty International he had been shot in the left shoulder on Mohamed Ali Street in the morning, and that those who tried to rescue him were shot at.

A 17-year-old boy recovering from a gunshot wound to the chest told Amnesty International that he arrived in Mohamed Ali Street at about 10:20 to witness scenes of chaos: tear gas, fleeing protesters and gunshots being fired. Another injured teenager, a 19-year-old student, told Amnesty International that he was near the Baharia café on Mohamed Ali Street when he was shot in the back from the direction of the Prison at about 10:15. He said that security forces did not issue any audible warnings for protesters to disperse before firing.

Officer Ahmed Ashraf Ibrahim Ismail and Aiman Abdel Azim Mahmoud, a lower ranking member of the security forces, also died. A source at the Ministry of Interior told Amnesty International it was as a result of gunshot wounds “when protecting” the Prison’s premises from the outside.

27 January

Violence erupted during a funeral procession for 28 people killed in the clashes. Eyewitness reports described the heavy use of tear gas as the procession reached 23 July Street at around 12:45-13:00.

A mourner carrying a coffin told Amnesty International that when the procession reached the Military Academy Hall, he counted 11 tear gas canisters fired into the procession, leading him to drop the coffin and flee the scene. Others also reported the use of shotguns during the funeral procession. After the funeral procession ended, angry protesters clashed with security forces in the vicinity of the Arab Police Station.

Local medical sources confirmed receiving 536 patients including women, mostly suffering from suffocation due to tear gas. At least five people died in the violence as a result of gunshot wounds.

Relatives told Amnesty International that father-of-one, Mohamed Al-Dumiyati, 32, was shot dead at about 18:00 while he was getting food for his family. The family lives between Sharqia Street and Daqahlia Street, near the epicentre of the clashes.

According to a “death declaration” seen by Amnesty International, and signed by a forensic pathologist, Mohamed died as a result of a gunshot wound to the head.

A pregnant woman told Amnesty International that her husband, Ahmed Mohamed Mahmoud was outside with some friends at 17:30 in the vicinity of the Arab Police Station, when he received a fatal gunshot wound to the chest and died in the street.

At around the same time eyewitnesses reported the death of Mohamed Fawzi Mohamed, 25, who was killed by a gunshot wound to the head near the Arab Police Station. A “death declaration” obtained by the family and reviewed by Amnesty International corroborates the nature of the injury.

In a televised speech, President Morsi thanked policemen for their actions defending public institutions; imposed a state of emergency and a curfew in Port Said and two other governorates, and instructed security forces to act with “determination and strength” against any threats to the country’s “security”.

28 January

Angry protesters again clashed with security forces near the Arab Police Station.

A march was also held by thousands of residents of Port Said, including women and children, after 21:00, defying the curfew imposed by President Mohamed Morsi the previous day.

Two further deaths were confirmed by medical sources - one near the Arab Police Station at around sunset, and the other near the Mariam Mosque at around midnight.

Recommendations to the Egyptian authorities:

- Ensure that full, independent and impartial investigations are conducted into the violence in Port Said and that bodies whose forces are implicated in the killings, in particular the Ministry of Interior, are not responsible for the evidence-gathering process and have no access to sensitive information. Ensure that the Ministry of Interior co-operates with investigations by sharing vital evidence, such as registries of members of the security forces present at Port Said's General Prison and Arab Police Station and registries of munitions distributed to security forces.

- Ensure that all those found responsible are brought to justice in proceedings meeting international standards of fair trial.

- State their commitment to respect the right to peaceful assembly and take immediate steps to ensure that excessive force is not used. Make clear that violence by some protesters should not be used as a justification for using lethal force when it is not strictly necessary to protect life.

- Ensure that relatives of victims receive forensic reports detailing the nature of the injuries.

END