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Egypt: Detained Morsi supporters denied their rights

Scores of detainees arrested following the dispersal of two large pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo last month have been deprived of their basic legal rights, Amnesty International said.

The organization has documented several cases of protesters who were denied prompt access to their lawyers and relatives, or an opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of their detention after their arrest.

“The failure of the Egyptian authorities to respect due process for people who have been arrested is a worrying sign. Everyone must be equal before the law. It is unacceptable for supporters of Morsi or the Muslim Brotherhood to be singled out for unfair treatment based on their political affiliations,” said Philip Luther, Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International.

“All of those detained by the authorities must immediately be given access to their lawyers and families.”

Security forces have arrested at least 3,000 people, mostly supporters or members of the Muslim Brotherhood, since 3 July, according to lawyers representing them. Around 600 have since been released.

The organization is concerned that among those arrested are men and women, who were merely exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly by protesting in support of ousted President Mohamed Morsi.

Many face a broad array of serious charges which include murder, attacking security personnel, possession of weapons, and inciting murder and other violence.

“Anyone detained solely for peacefully exercising the rights to freedom of assembly, association or expression must be released immediately and unconditionally. The authorities must also scrupulously respect the fair trial rights of all detainees,” said Philip Luther.

“The way Egypt’s judicial system deals with these cases will test whether it can truly perform its functions fairly and impartially, free from the influence of the executive.”

Many detained protesters arrested during the dispersal of the Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahda sit-ins on 14 August were denied access to their lawyers for at least four days. Muslim Brotherhood lawyers said they could not attend investigations because interrogations were conducted during curfew hours, or they had not been informed of their client’s location or the date and time of the investigations.

A lawyer from the Front to Defend Egypt’s Protesters, an independent lawyers’ group, told Amnesty International that on 27 August security forces in Abu-Zaabal prison had barred his team of 50 lawyers from attending investigations and detention renewals of protesters arrested during the dispersal of Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in on 14 August.

Only 20 lawyers were allowed to attend investigation sessions at the prison, although there were more

than 700 detainees being investigated there. Lawyers who did attend told Amnesty International that investigation sessions involving 600 persons lasted for only 15 minutes without the detainees or lawyers being given the chance to present their defence.

In many cases this meant detainees were questioned without lawyers present. In addition, several investigation sessions by the prosecutor were held in police stations, prisons or Central Security Forces camps. The presence of security personnel in the vicinity could cast doubt over the impartiality of the investigations.

In many instances, detainees were not brought before a judge within 24 hours, as required by Egyptian law, leading to extended detention periods.

“Blocking access to legal representation is a serious violation of human rights. All those arrested must be given an effective opportunity to be heard promptly by a judicial officer in the presence of a legal representative, and to be entitled to a trial within a reasonable time or to release,” said Philip Luther.

Among those arrested on 16 August during violence in Ramsis Square, 80 people, 77 men and three women, were held for at least 14 days at Hadayek El-Kubba police station – in two cells each designed to hold a maximum of 20 prisoners. The women were held separately.

Among them was a woman with a broken leg, who was held for four days without being transferred to hospital or being allowed to see a doctor. Her repeated requests for medical help were refused. She was only transferred to a hospital on the prosecutor’s orders after her detention had been renewed. Amnesty International urges the authorities to grant detainees requiring medical attention access to doctors.

The organization has also learned that there are at least 250 people being held in Cairo’s Al-Salam Central Security Forces camp, an unofficial place of detention, in violation of their rights.

At least 30 people arrested during violence near North Giza Court in Giza on 16 August continue to be held in unknown locations.

“Security forces and prosecutor must reveal precise information identifying the place of custody of those held in unknown locations,” said Philip Luther.

Background

Since 3 July 2013, the security forces have arrested at least 3,000 people and released 600. At least 2,200 people, are still being held in Tora, Abu Zabaal, Cairo Appeal, Wadi El-Natroon, El-Kanater prisons and Al-Salam Central Security Forces camp in Cairo according to lawyers.

The arrests were carried out after the security forces used excessive force against pro-Morsi protests or following armed clashes between rival camps in Cairo, including during incidents in the area of Al-Moqattam (30 June), the Republican Guards Club (5 and 8 July), in the vicinity of the Unknown Soldier Mausoleum (27 July), during the dispersals of the Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahda sit-ins (14 August) and in Ramsis Square (16 August).