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Egypt: Four migrants killed - Authorities must reign in border guards

The Egyptian authorities must control their forces at the border with Israel and prevent them from killing migrants attempting to cross it, Amnesty International said on Wednesday. The call follows the deadliest border incident this year, in which four men were shot dead by Egyptian security forces as they attempted to cross the border into Israel. Two others were also injured in the incident.

“Enough is enough. This incident is further proof, if any should be needed, that the Egyptian authorities have yet to direct their forces on how to avoid killing migrants trying to cross the border,” said Malcolm Smart, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International. “They must assert greater control over their forces at the border and take away their license to kill.”

So far this year, Egyptian security forces have killed at least 11 people trying to cross the border into Israel. At least 11 others have been wounded – some critically. Those include the victims of Tuesday’s incident.

Thousands of individuals, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, mostly from Sudan and Eritrea as well as other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, try to cross from Egypt to Israel each year.

They run the risk of being shot dead by Egyptian border guards who still appear to lack adequate training for handling such situations and frequently resort to lethal force rather than other means of intervention, despite the spiralling number of victims. No investigation is known to have been held into any of the shootings and the names and nationalities of those killed are rarely disclosed. Some of the victims may not have been carrying identification papers.

Amnesty International is urging the Egyptian authorities to open an investigation into the killings of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers at the border, to clarify the specific circumstances in which security officers at the border are instructed that they may use firearms and to ensure that these comply with relevant international human rights standards.

Background:

At least 28 people, mostly Sudanese and Eritreans, were shot dead and scores injured and then arrested while trying to cross into Israel without official permission in 2008.

The use of lethal force, which began in mid 2007, may be as a result of Israel’s pressure on Egypt to reduce the flow of people crossing the border into its territory without authorization.

According to the UNHCR, some two to three million Sudanese nationals live in Egypt; most of them are migrants. However, they also include thousands of refugees who have fled persecution in Sudan.

While states have the right to exercise authority over their border and to regulate entry into their territory, any measures taken in this regard must not come in conflict with or violate internationally recognized human rights law and standards.

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