

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Egypt: UN experts concerned about persistence of torture**

On 20 November 2002, the UN Committee against Torture, charged with overseeing the implementation of the Convention against Torture, expressed particular concern at the widespread evidence of torture in premises of the Egyptian State Security Intelligence, the many reports of "abuse of under-age detainees, especially sexual harassment of girls, committed by law enforcement officials," and ill-treatment of people because of their sexual orientation.

The Committee against Torture also issued a set of 19 recommendations to the Egyptian government. These include a call to abolish incommunicado detention and to ensure that all detained people have immediate access to a doctor and a lawyer, as well as contact with family members. The Committee also recommended that premises controlled by the State Security Intelligence should be subject to mandatory inspections.

"The Egyptian government must act decisively to end torture by adopting the necessary legal and practical measures to ensure effective implementation of all the provisions of international human rights treaties, in particular the Convention against Torture," Amnesty International said.

Earlier this month the UN Human Rights Committee, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, noted with concern "the persistence of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment at the hands of law-enforcement personnel, in particular the security services whose recourse to such practices appears to display a systematic pattern".

The examination of Egypt's report by the Committee against Torture was observed by representatives of several Egyptian and international human rights organizations.

The Egyptian delegation made some alarming statements during the session, in particular their admission that premises of the State Security Intelligence, where torture is routinely practiced, are excluded from mandatory judicial inspections of detention centres. The Egyptian delegation told the Committee against Torture that "incompatibility of timetables" had not made a visit to the country by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture possible.

However, such an explanation seems to be in contradiction to statements made by the Special Rapporteur who, earlier this year, informed the UN Commission on Human Rights that a request to visit Egypt has been pending since 1996 and has not resulted in an invitation. The Committee against Torture called on the Egyptian authorities to agree to a visit by the Special Rapporteur.

"Everyone taken into detention in Egypt is at risk of torture," Amnesty International said in a recent report (*Egypt: No protection - systematic torture continues*<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/MDE120312002>). In connection with the report Amnesty International has launched a short web-based video on torture in Egypt, which includes testimonies of torture survivors and human rights activists ([http://emedia.amnesty.org/Egypt\\_torture.ram](http://emedia.amnesty.org/Egypt_torture.ram)).

Amnesty International calls on the Egyptian government to take immediate action to implement the recommendations of the Committee against Torture, including:

guaranteeing that all complaints of torture or ill-treatment, including those relating to death in custody, are investigated promptly, impartially and independently;  
ensuring mandatory inspection of all places of detention;

abolishing incommunicado detention;

halting and punishing all practices involving abuse of minors in places of detention;

enabling victims of torture to obtain full redress, while avoiding unjustified disparities in compensation;  
and

ensuring that human rights organizations pursue their activities unhindered, and in particular that they have access to all places of detention and prisons.

### **Background**

Torture is a long-standing concern in Egypt, documented by Amnesty International for more than two decades. Reports by Egyptian and international human rights organizations, based on interviews with victims and witnesses, medical examinations and judgments by Egyptian courts, clearly demonstrate the systematic practice of torture.

The most common methods of torture include electric shocks, beatings, whipping and suspension by wrists or ankles in a contorted position from a horizontal bar. Testimonies of torture victims refer to a variety of torture equipment such as electric devices, whips and the *falaka* instrument which is used to tie the victim's feet prior to being beaten on the soles of the feet.

That torture is widespread and systematic in Egypt has long been testified by specialized UN bodies, although domestic and international law forbids the torture of detainees. In 2001 the UN Special Rapporteur on torture concluded that "torture is systematically practiced by the security forces in Egypt, in particular by the State Security Intelligence."

Following submissions by Amnesty International and the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, in November 1991 the Committee against Torture began a confidential procedure under Article 20 of the UN Convention against Torture regarding "well-founded indications that torture is being systematically practised in the territory of a State Party."

Following the examination of Egypt's second periodic report in November 1993, the Committee against Torture expressed concern "about the fact that torture is apparently still widespread in Egypt." In May 1996 the Committee against Torture published its conclusions under the Article 20 procedure stating that "torture is systematically practised by the security forces in Egypt, in particular the State Security Intelligence, since in spite of the denials of the government, the allegations of torture submitted by reliable, non-governmental organizations consistently indicate that reported cases of torture are seen to be habitual, widespread and deliberate in at least a considerable part of the country."

On 20 November 2002 the Committee against Torture noted that it still expects to receive

information from the Egyptian authorities regarding recommendations made in 1996 in connection with its assessment of systematic practice of torture (as provided for in Article 20 of the Convention).

Amnesty International has submitted a briefing to the Committee against Torture outlining its concerns regarding the widespread and systematic practice of torture and ill-treatment in Egypt.

Public Document

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