

## **Egypt: Torture Remains Rife as Cries for Justice Go Unheeded**

Amnesty International has described as "widespread and indiscriminate" incidents of torture and ill-treatment in Egyptian police stations and detention centres. Launching a report today, entitled "Egypt: Torture Remains Rife as Cries for Justice Go Unheeded," the human rights organization stressed that "No one is safe from harm." The majority of victims, who include women, the young and the elderly, are held in police stations in connection with criminal investigations.

Over the years, thousands of detainees in Egypt have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment. The most common forms of torture reported to Amnesty International and other human rights organizations are electric shocks, beatings, whipping, suspension by the wrists or ankles, suspension in contorted positions from a horizontal pole and various forms of psychological torture, including death threats and threats of rape or sexual abuse of the detainees or their female relatives.

The report cites testimonies from numerous victims whose lives have been changed forever as a result of their traumatic experiences at the hands of torturers. On 3 March 2000 Salha Sayid Qasim, a 37-year old housemaid and mother of four, was taken from her employer's house to Giza Police Headquarters by security officers on suspicion of burgling her employer's house. There, she was reportedly threatened with sexual abuse, including gang rape by police officers. After hours of torture, Salha Sayid Qasim was sent to spend the night in a cell with a male prisoner. Salha Sayid Qasim was released on 4 March 2000 without charge.

Also prominent is the case of Mohammad Badr al-Din Gom'a Isma'il, a 39-year-old school bus driver, who was detained in September 1996 and tortured into confessing to the killing of his missing daughter. After his daughter reappeared, apparently in an attempt to

cover up the false charge of killing his daughter, the police detained both mother and daughter for several days. Even after their release, Mohammad Badr al-Din Gom'a Isma'il was kept in detention and the torture continued. During his detention, he was subjected to electric shocks, including to sensitive parts of the body, and beaten while suspended from a door.

Even when detainees have died in custody, apparently as a result of torture, members of the security services are rarely brought to justice. However, in recent years, several police officers have been brought to trial for the death of detainees when torture appears to have caused or contributed to the deaths. The latest instance, saw the conviction of six prison officials in February 2001, for the death of Muhammad 'Issa, a prisoner in Wadi al-Natrun prison. A criminal court sentenced the prison officials to several years' imprisonment.

There has been a significant reduction in reports of torture of political detainees, mainly due to a decrease in the arrests of alleged members of armed Islamist groups in the past few years. Despite this, reports of torture of political detainees continue, particularly when they are held incommunicado. Hundreds or thousands of torture complaints, lodged with the authorities, have never been properly investigated, contributing to a cycle of impunity which facilitates further torture.

Amnesty International welcomes some positive steps undertaken by the Egyptian authorities, such as the ban on flogging and caning in prisons announced in 2000. However, the Egyptian government continues to shirk its responsibilities under national and international legislation, which both prohibit the use of torture and ill-treatment. National and international human rights organizations, as well as UN bodies, have repeatedly submitted detailed recommendations to the government, which have largely been ignored.

*Amnesty International is again calling on the Egyptian government to protect its citizens from grave human rights violations by implementing concrete measures, including basic safeguards for the protection of detainees, immediate access to detainees by lawyers, relatives and doctors as well as the establishment of prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture.*

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