

AI Index: PRE 01/583/2011
22 November 2011

Egypt: Military rulers have "crushed" hopes of 25 January protesters

Egypt's military rulers have completely failed to live up to their promises to Egyptians to improve human rights and have instead been responsible for a catalogue of abuses which in some cases exceeds the record of Hosni Mubarak, Amnesty International said today in a new report.

In *Broken Promises: Egypt's Military Rulers Erode Human Rights*, the organization documents a woeful performance on human rights by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) which assumed power after the fall of former President Hosni Mubarak in February.

The report's release follows a bloody few days in Egypt that has left many dead and hundreds injured after army and security forces violently attempted to disperse anti-SCAF protesters from Cairo's Tahrir square.

"By using military courts to try thousands of civilians, cracking down on peaceful protest and expanding the remit of Mubarak's Emergency Law, the SCAF has continued the tradition of repressive rule which the January 25 demonstrators fought so hard to get rid of," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Acting Director.

"Those who have challenged or criticized the military council - like demonstrators, journalists, bloggers, striking workers - have been ruthlessly suppressed, in an attempt at silencing their voices.

"The human rights balance sheet for SCAF shows that after nine months in charge of Egypt, the aims and aspirations of the January 25 revolution have been crushed. The brutal and heavy-handed response to protests in the last few days bears all the hallmarks of the Mubarak era."

Amnesty International found in its review of human rights under the SCAF that the military council had met few of the commitments it made in its many public statements and had worsened the situation in some areas.

By August, the SCAF admitted that some 12,000 civilians across the country had been tried by military courts following grossly unfair trials. At least 13 have been sentenced to death.

Charges against defendants have included "thuggery", "breaking the curfew", "damaging property" and "insulting the army".

The case of prisoner of conscience Maikel Nabil Sanad, a blogger sentenced to three years in prison in April for criticizing the military and objecting to military service, has become symbolic. After going on hunger strike in August, prison authorities have denied him the medication he needs to treat a heart condition. He continues to be held in prison as his case is being reviewed by another court following an appeal in October.

In a clear attempt to suppress negative media reporting about the SCAF, scores of journalists and broadcasters have been summoned to the military prosecutor. Pressure from the military has led to a number of major current affairs shows being cancelled.

The SCAF promised in early statements to “carry out their leading role in protecting protesters regardless of their views” but security forces, including the army, have violently suppressed several protests, resulting in deaths and injuries.

Twenty-eight people are believed to have been killed on 9 October after security forces dispersed a protest by Coptic Christians. Medics told Amnesty International that casualties included bullet wounds and crushed body parts, after people were run over by speeding armoured vehicles. Instead of ordering an independent investigation, the army announced that it would carry out the investigation itself and moved quickly to suppress criticism.

Prominent blogger Alaa Abd El Fatta, who witnessed the violence and criticized the fact that the army was leading on the investigation into the crackdown, continues to be detained following his questioning by military prosecutors on 30 October, in what seems to be an attempt by the SCAF to stem criticism of their bloody handling of the Maspero protests.

Amnesty International said it had seen consistent reports that the security forces were employing armed “baltagiya ” or “thugs” – to attack protesters. This was a well-known tactic employed under the rule of Hosni Mubarak.

Torture in detention has continued under the SCAF and Amnesty International has interviewed detainees who said they were tortured in army custody. In September a video circulated showing army and police officers beating and giving shocks to two detainees. After apparently carrying out an investigation, the military prosecution dismissed the video as “fake”, without giving any further details.

Amnesty International said that the SCAF has used promises of investigations to deflect criticism of serious human rights violations, but has failed to deliver. No perpetrators of such abuses are known to have been brought to justice.

In a notable example, the military council announced on 28 March it would investigate the use of forced “virginity tests” by the army to intimidate 17 female protesters on 9 March, but no information about this investigation has been made public. Instead, the only woman who filed a complaint against the SCAF was said to have been subjected to harassment and intimidation.

Amnesty International also said that forced evictions of Egypt’s slum residents had been carried out by military forces after they assumed law enforcement duties in early 2011, and called for an end to the practice of forced evictions.

The organization called on the Egyptian authorities – including the SCAF – to restore confidence in public institutions by properly and transparently investigating human rights violations and lifting the Emergency Law.

When Amnesty International's Secretary General Salil Shetty met SCAF representatives in June, he had urged them to scrap the 1981 Emergency Law which unfairly restricted a number of fundamental rights.

But in September the Emergency Law was expanded to cover offences such as disturbing traffic, blocking roads, broadcasting rumours, possessing and trading in weapons, and “assault on freedom to work”. Those arrested under the emergency law are tried before special courts known as (Emergency) Supreme State Security Courts.

“The Egyptian military cannot keep using security as an excuse to keep to the same old practices that we saw under President Mubarak,” said Philip Luther.

“If there is to be an effective transition to the new Egypt that protesters have been demanding, the SCAF must release their grip on freedom of expression, association and assembly, lift the state of emergency and stop trying civilians in military courts.”

Notes for editors:

Spokespeople: Egypt researchers Said Haddadi and Mohamed Lotfy (English, Arabic, French) and Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director (English, French) are available for interview from London. For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

Amnesty International can on request put media organizations in touch with the families of Egyptians currently being detained by the military prosecution.