

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Investigate potential extrajudicial execution of North Sinai men: *Six of the men were in police custody at the time of their killing***

The Egyptian judicial authorities must conduct an impartial, independent and thorough investigation into the killing of 10 men by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) on 13 January in al-Arish in the North Sinai governorate and bring those responsible to justice, Amnesty International said today. Six of the 10 men were in police custody at the time of their killing, having been held incommunicado for up to three months.

The families only learnt of their relatives' death from the MOI's [announcement](#). They told Amnesty International of their shock at the news given the assurances they had received from the al-Arish security officials that their sons will be released in a matter of days.

Anger escalated among the residents of al-Arish after the MOI announcement and the city saw hundreds protesting against the false allegations of the MOI and calling for those responsible to be brought to justice. They also called on the government to immediately release all detainees held under conditions of enforced disappearance or outside judicial oversight.

On 13 January 2017, the Ministry of interior announced on its official [Facebook](#) page that its forces had raided a house on the same day in al-Arish where 10 members of the armed group Ansar Bait al-Maqdes, a.k.a. "Sinai Province" were hiding. The MOI added that the 10 men fired at the security forces as they tried to raid the house and the MOI forces then responded with live ammunition killing all 10 men. In the same statement, the MOI listed six names, stating that the other four men were unidentified and that all men participated in operations targeting the security forces in which dozens of soldiers and police had been killed.

Amnesty International spoke to five relatives of the men as well as more than eight Sinai- based activists including lawyers, political activists, and also with neighbours of some of the victims who had witnessed the arrests. They all confirmed that six of the men had been in the custody of the National Security Agency (NSA) of the Ministry of Interior in al-Arish for up to three months. They had been arrested from their homes or from the streets between October and November 2016.

The six men had been detained incommunicado and were not allowed to see their families or given access to a lawyer or referred to a prosecutor for questioning. Security officials in al-Arish had confirmed to the relatives that the six men were in the custody of the NSA in al-Arish but did not allow them to see or visit them.

Two of the families told Amnesty International that following their relatives' arrest in October they had met with the security officials in al-Arish security directorate who told them that their sons were in the custody of the National Security Agency, and that they had been arrested on suspicion grounds of their involvement in criminal or terrorism-related activities and that they would be "released in a couple of days". Yet the men were never released.

Three of the families sent postal telegrams to the Minister of Interior, Public Prosecution office, and the Minister of Justice informing them about the arrest of their relatives and that they had not been brought to the prosecutor office for questioning. The families also added that they had raised their relatives' case with the National Council for Human Rights in the hope that they could obtain a presidential pardon but they received no response to their postal telegrams.

### **Accounts from the families of the victims**

One of the 10 men is **Ahmed Youssef** aged 22 years old who worked as a driver. His uncle told Amnesty International that Ahmed Youssef was arrested on 17 October 2016 after security forces from the Ministry of Interior raided his home in al-Arish. He had married just two months at the time of his arrest and his wife was pregnant. When the security forces raided his home, they also beat his wife, including by pushing her to the ground, and she suffered a miscarriage. Following his arrest, his family went to the National Security Agency building in al-Arish where a security official informed them that Ahmed Youssef was in their custody and would be released in a couple of days. They did not allow the family members to see him. On 20 October 2016, Ahmed Youssef's wife sent postal telegrams to the Minister of Interior, the Public Prosecutor and the Minister of Justice stating that her husband had been arrested and, three days later, had yet to be brought before a prosecutor. She also sent a postal telegram on the same date to the National Council for Human Rights.

The second man, **Abd el-Aty Ali Abd el-Aty**, was 23 years old and a student at Al Azhar university, was arrested on 8 October on al-Qahera street in al-Arish, according to his father. He had been driving a pick-up truck and had stopped to help a car that was stuck in the road. Minutes later, armed security forces dressed in black and covering their faces arrested him and the driver of the other car and took them to the National Security Agency premises in al-Arish. The family of Abd el-Aty only learnt of his arrest a couple of days later when they found his pick-up truck parked in the grounds of the Second al-Arish police station. His mother later met with the head of al-Arish security directorate who informed her that her son had been arrested on "suspicion" grounds and that he would be released soon. His family sent postal telegrams on 5 November to the Presidency, the Minister of Interior, the Public Prosecutor and the Minister of Justice but they never received a response. They also sent telegrams to the National Council for Human Rights asking for Abd el-Aty to be pardoned by the president through the Pardons Committee. Another close relative told Amnesty International that Abd el-Aty had a paralyzed left arm and had applied to the government recruitment scheme for people with disabilities.

The uncle of the third man, **Mohamed Ibrahim**, aged 22 years, told Amnesty International that his nephew had been arrested on 23 November 2016 from his home at 2:00am. He stated that heavily armed and masked security forces from the Ministry of Interior had arrived in Humvees armoured vehicles, breaking into the family home of Mohamed and arrested him, his younger brother Ayman and his father. The security forces did not inform their family where they were taking them to or why. The security forces then put the father and brother in one Humvee vehicle and Mohamed Ibrahim in another and took them to unknown locations. The family went to the National Security Agency building in al-Arish who denied that the three men were in their custody. The family then headed to the Third al-Arish police station where police told them that the three men were in the custody of the National Security Agency and would be released soon. The next day, police released the father and brother from the Second al-Arish police station. They did not know the whereabouts of Mohamed since the time of their arrest as he was not held in the Second al-Arish police station with them.

The fourth man was **Mansour Gamee**, aged 27 years old, who worked as a driver. According to a close relative, security officials arrested Mansour Gamee from his home in Karam abu Negela neighborhood in al-Arish in October 2016 and took him to unknown location. The family learned later through informal sources that he was in the custody of the National Security Agency. His family was not able to visit him until they saw the statement by the Ministry of Interior announcing his death. The fifth man, **Belal Hemdan al-Naggar** was a 19-year old student. According to a close relative, he had been arrested in October 2016 by the Ministry of Interior from his home in al-Arish and that was the last his family heard of him until they saw the Ministry of Interior statement. The sixth man **Ahmed Saad al-Mahdy Mohamed el-Sherbeeny** was a 17-year-old student and according to a local Sinai group documenting

cases of arbitrary detention, he was arrested in November from his home in al-Masaeed neighborhood in al-Arish by the Ministry of Interior.

### **Escalating steps from families and residents of al-Arish**

Anger amongst the residents of al-Arish escalated after the killing of the 10 men and in a rare public meeting of protest hundreds of residents including the families of the victims gathered on 14 January 2017 in the house of al-Ayoub, the family home of two of the victims. In this meeting, the families and residents agreed to a list of demands to the government and to members of the parliament representing al-Arish district. The [demands](#) include:

1. Calling for an investigation into the killing of the 10 men and for those responsible to be brought to justice.
2. Facilitation of the procedures for the families to receive the bodies of the victims and bury them without harassment and intimidation from the authorities.
3. Immediate release of all detainees held under conditions of enforced disappearance or arbitrarily detained and held incommunicado without judicial oversight. This condition was specifically highlighted as the “residents of al-Arish do not trust the MOI to follow the legal channels after this incident”.

They also called upon the al-Arish members of parliament to resign and stated that they would turn to peaceful civil disobedience if their demands are not met.

The participants in the meeting formed a committee to follow up the implementation of these demands. The committee then announced that they will hold daily meetings in the house of al-Ayoub to follow up the implementation of these demands and put pressure on the authorities.

In response to these demands member of parliament for al-Arish district Dr. Hossam el-Refaiy communicated with tribal leaders and condemned the incident and showed his solidarity with the families and residents of al-Arish. According to Ashraf Hefny, a member of the follow-up committee, Dr. al-Refaiy also informed them that he will raise the issue in the parliament, including the demands of the families and residents, and if his efforts did not lead to the implementation of these demands he will resign in response to the demands of the people. The MP on 16 January called on the speaker of parliament and other members of parliament to establish a fact-finding committee to investigate the killing of the 10 men. However, the Speaker declined to form such a committee and [stated](#) that the “security forces are responsible for ensuring the safety of our citizens and cannot commit such acts”.

So far the bodies of five of the six men were received by their families from al-Ismaia morgue. Belal Hemdan’s family received his body on 15 January and buried him the same day in a funeral that was attended by hundreds of people. On 16 January, the bodies of Ahmed Youssef and Abd el-Aty Ali were received and buried on the same day in one [funeral](#) that saw hundreds of residents in al-Arish. Also, the body of Mansour Gamee was received by his family on 17 January and buried on the same day while the body of Mohamed Ibrahim was buried on 19 January. The body of Ahmed Saad al-Mahdy is still in the Ismaia morgue to be received by his family in the next few days. An autopsy has been conducted on the bodies and the reason for death is specified as “gunshots”. One witness who attended the washing of the body of Abd el-Aty Ali ahead of the burial informed Amnesty International that the body bore bruises and a bullet wound.

### **Background information on the situation in North Sinai**

Since the ousting of Mohamed Morsi in July 2013 and the violent dispersal of the two sit-ins of his supporters in Cairo on 14 August 2013, armed attacks against the security forces have been on the rise across the country and particularly in North Sinai. Scores of ordinary residents in North Sinai have been either killed or injured as a result of the armed attacks from the military or the armed groups. The

armed group Ansar Bait al-Maqdes, which changed its name to Wilayet Sina (Sinai Province) when it declared allegiance to the armed groups calling itself Islamic State (IS), has claimed responsibility for many attacks against the security forces, members of the judiciary and even ordinary residents and tourists. The group has claimed responsibility for the killing of more than 220 passengers and crew of a Russian airliner blown up over North Sinai Governorate in October 2015 and the shooting to death of three judges in al-Arish in May 2015. According to officials, more than 500 members of the security forces were killed by armed groups in North Sinai since July 2013.

The Egyptian government has used these security threats as a pretext to clampdown on human rights. Thousands of families had their homes demolished and forcibly evicted without being provided alternative accommodation or housing. Further, reportedly hundreds more are held under conditions of enforced disappearance or arbitrarily detained outside of judicial oversight.

The government's heavy-handed security measures have also taken a heavy toll on the residents of al-Arish and other cities and villages in North Sinai who have suffered economically as a result of the curfews imposed in many areas, shortages of food and medical supplies as well as long-standing power and water cuts and insufficient communications infrastructures.