

AI INDEX: MDE 12/05/96  
21 FEBRUARY 1996

EGYPT: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED AT THE ESCALATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN UPPER EGYPT

Against a backdrop of escalating political violence over the past week in Upper Egypt, Amnesty International is urgently calling for an immediate halt to killings of civilians by both armed opposition groups and security forces.

Armed men alleged to be members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, an armed Islamist group, are reported to have deliberately killed seven civilians, while security forces killed at least two alleged members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* in circumstances suggesting that they might have been extrajudicially executed. In addition, at least 160 people were arrested over the past few days in connection with the political violence.

“We are extremely concerned about this dangerous escalation of violence,” Amnesty International said. “The government and armed opposition groups should act now to stop the killings.”

On 20 February three gunmen, alleged members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, reportedly attacked a house in the village of Sahel Salim and killed two Coptic Christian brothers, Nabil Was'at Bashta, aged 29, and Girgis aged 13.

On 19 February and on the eve of 'Id al-Fitr (end of Ramadhan), five civilians were shot dead in a coffee shop in the village of al-'Aqal al-Bahri near the town of al-Badari, south of Asyut, by three gunmen alleged to be members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*.

On 14 February two alleged members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, 'Ali Sattuhi and Mahmoud Mohammad al-Walidi, were killed by security forces in the village of al-Zuk al-Gharbiya near Sohag, south of Asyut. The security forces claimed that the two, who were inside a house, refused to give themselves up and started shooting at them. They reportedly returned fire and killed them.

Amnesty International, however, is concerned that the two might have been unlawfully killed. In a number of past incidents, alleged members of Islamist armed groups appear to have been extrajudicially executed in similar circumstances. Official reports that an exchange of fire took place were denied by eyewitnesses and other sources.

Over the last week security forces have arrested more than 160 people in Minya and Asyut governorates in connection with the political violence.

“We condemn all deliberate killings of civilians by armed opposition groups,” Amnesty International said. “Such killings are human rights abuses which should not be tolerated.”

Amnesty International calls on the government and armed opposition groups to abide by international humanitarian standards which prohibit the killing of prisoners and other deliberate and arbitrary killings.

ENDS\