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Egypt: Systematic failure to rein in security forces

A year after the uprising, Egypt's security forces continue to kill protesters with the same brutal tactics used in Hosni Mubarak's last days in power, Amnesty International said after concluding that riot police yet again used excessive force in policing protests in Cairo and Suez.

The protests earlier this month followed the Port Said tragedy in which more than 70 football fans from Al-Ahly club were killed after a football match on 1 February.

The organization found that, between 2 and 6 February, the Ministry of Interior's Central Security Forces (riot police) used excessive force, including firearms, to disperse angry protests, killing at least 16 people and injuring hundreds of others.

"The behaviour of the security forces in dealing with these protests is unfortunately very reminiscent of a time many Egyptians thought they had left behind after the '25 January Revolution'," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

"Promises of reform of the security forces continue to ring hollow in the face of the killing of more than a hundred protesters in the last five months."

"Not only have the authorities not reformed the security forces but evidence of the use of shotguns and live ammunition is met with denial and accusation of foreign interference by Egyptian officials."

Previous calls for reform of the security sector only led to piecemeal changes while the authorities continued to inappropriately use teargas and live ammunitions.

The Egyptian authorities ostensibly announced investigations into incidents leading to the killing or severe injury of protesters. Yet no lessons were learnt and no clear instructions seem to have been given to the security forces, including military personnel, to uphold the right to peaceful assembly and to police demonstrations in line with international standards.

Lethal force was used without prior warning to disperse protesters in Cairo and Suez in February 2012 who were, for the most part, peacefully demonstrating and chanting.

Some protesters were, however, throwing stones at the security forces and Amnesty International heard occasional reports of protesters throwing Molotov cocktails at the riot police. In rare incidents, shotgun ammunition and fireworks were also fired at riot police.

"Police should not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury. Intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

"Security forces have a duty to restore law and order, however, the recent use of excessive force by the

security forces show a complete disrespect for human life.”

"It is now very clear that the newly elected parliamentary assembly must urgently tackle the long overdue reforms to the way security forces have been policing demonstrations.”

"Unless the Egyptian security apparatus is reformed with the aim of providing security and upholding the right to peaceful protest, we fear more bloodshed will follow."

Casualties

The Cairo University Hospitals alone received some 269 injured people during the protests as well as seven of the 11 deaths that took place in the capital.

Most of those injured were suffering from tear gas inhalation or injuries from shotgun pellets, which, in some cases, caused rupture to the eye globe.

In one case, a protester died from shotgun ammunition after a pellet reached his brain. Two others died from gunshots to the head and one from a gunshot to the stomach.

In Suez, Amnesty International obtained a list of some 85 injured who were treated at the Suez General Hospital, mainly from shotgun pellets and live ammunition. Five people died in the city from gunshots to the chest, head or stomach.

The list of names included four members of the security forces who were also reported to having been injured by shotgun pellets in Suez.

Excessive use of tear gas

Amnesty International delegates witnessed riot police relentlessly firing tear gas at groups of anti-SCAF protesters standing in Cairo's Mansur street and Mohamed Mahmoud street, both leading to the Ministry of Interior and which witnessed the worst clashes.

Riot police used tear gas disproportionately in instances when protesters did not represent an imminent danger to safety. They never gave notice before firing tear gas canisters.

Volunteer doctors and witnesses in both Cairo and Suez reported that riot police aimed tear gas directly at the very field hospitals that provide first aid treatment to protesters suffering from tear gas inhalation and other injuries. In Suez, some media workers for TV 25 were also targeted directly with tear gas causing respiratory difficulties.

Some US-made tear gas canisters in Suez bore a manufacture date of August 2011, suggesting they were part of a recent US shipment of tear gas delivered to Egypt in November. In December 2011 Amnesty International called on global arms suppliers to halt the transfer of tear gas, small arms, ammunition and other repressive equipment to the Egyptian military and security forces.

Illustrative individual cases

Cairo

Twenty-four year old painter **Ahmed Hassan Ali**, a protester in Tahrir square, suffered a rupture to his right eye from a shotgun pellet significantly affecting his sight.

He told Amnesty International he was injured from a rubber bullet in Mansur Street on 4 February at 6am. He sustained the injury as he went to tell other protesters to return to the square and avoid confrontation with the riot police. He said protesters were peacefully chanting against SCAF when police opened fire prior to warning.

On 5 February at around 1.30am, **Ahmed Maher**, General Coordinator of the “6 April Youth Movement” pro-democracy protest group was injured with a fracture in the top of his skull as he stood at the intersection of Mansur and Mohamed Mahmoud streets, causing internal bleeding. After a meeting with MPs in the parliament he went to tell protesters to move away from the area and end the protest, so that the authorities could build a concrete wall at Mansur Street by the Ministry of Interior. He fell as a result of his injury, losing his blackberry. The Twitter account he administers for the movement was subsequently hacked.

Amnesty International fears he may have been targeted in this incident as the authorities have been mounting a smear campaign against the “6 April Youth Movement”, accusing it publicly of conspiring against Egypt.

On 5 February at around 11pm, 26-year-old **Salma Said Abdel Fattah**, an activist in the “No to Military Trials for Civilians” and “Mosireen” (Determined) groups, was injured by shotgun pellets as she filmed riot police armoured vehicles attacking protesters from Mansur street rushing towards Falaky square. She told Amnesty International that a hooded riot police officer on the top of an armoured vehicle shot at her three times, first at her face, chest and legs, and finally as other protesters were carrying her away.

Suez

In Suez, most casualties took place near the Security Directorate headquarters near Paradise Street and Al-Shohadaa Street between 2 and 4 February. The Security Directorate oversees a large square with a garden, from where protesters attempted to approach the building, among other side roads. Access to the building itself was barred by barbed wire.

Around sunset, according to protesters, riot police fired indiscriminately tear gas and shotgun ammunition without any prior warning as they approached the Security Directorate.

Mohamed Ahmed Atta was reportedly killed in the evening of 2 February from a gunshot to his upper body while throwing stones at riot police. Rami Mohamed, a 25 year old member of the “Suez Youth Bloc”, told Amnesty International he had witnessed security forces shooting at Mohamed Ahmed Atta without issuing any form of warning. Rami Mohamed was himself injured the next day from a live round in his pelvis also while throwing stones at riot police near the Security Directorate.

Mohamed Al-Sayed Ahmed Farrag, a 28 year old daily wage labourer, was killed, apparently by a sniper, in the early hours of 3 February after throwing stones at riot police. Friends of Mohamed told Amnesty International they witnessed riot police using tear gas intensively near the Security Directorate and decided to climb to the top floor of a 12-storey residential building still under construction to escape from the effects of the gas.

The group said that from the roof of the building they watched security forces shooting live ammunition at protesters and saw snipers at the top of the Security Directorate building and in buildings next to it. Every time the police pushed protesters out of the square, the group would throw stones at the riot police. At around 2am Mohamed Al-Sayed was standing by the window when he was shot in the head and died instantly.

Background:

In June 2011 Amnesty International's Secretary General presented a copy of its publication [*Understanding Policing*](#) to the then Minister of Interior Mansour Essawy. The book explains international standards on the use of force and firearms.

These standards request from law enforcement officials, notably, to use force only to the extent necessary to achieve a legitimate aim and only in proportion to this legitimate aim. The response should be gradual with an obligation to use non-violent means whenever possible to minimize damage and to protect life.

The use of firearms should be limited to situations of threats to life or of serious injury. Both, in Cairo and in Suez, the intensive and indiscriminate use of force and firearms without prior warning and causing a high number casualties, indicate that these international standards were disregarded in the handling of the demonstrations by the security forces.

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