



The Human Rights Situation in Egypt: Amnesty International's written statement to the 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council (3 to 28 March 2014)

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The scale and severity of ongoing human rights violations in Egypt requires immediate action by the Human Rights Council. Amnesty International urges the Council to condemn violations committed by the Egyptian authorities and to call for accountability in the face of mounting repression.

State institutions meant to provide protection against human rights violations and remedies have now become tools of oppression. Repressive legislation restricts the rights to freedoms of expression, association and assembly. The security forces commit gross human rights violations, using excessive force to disperse mostly peaceful protests, and arresting government opponents, activists, journalists and NGO workers. The judiciary has been quick to jail Mohamed Morsi's supporters and political activists on charges of violence and terrorism, while ignoring human rights violations by the authorities and abuses by the deposed president's opponents.

Some supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood have also committed abuses, and those who have committed criminal acts should face fair trials in line with international standards.

Unless the international community takes urgent steps, including in the Human Rights Council, to urge Egypt to end growing repression and deliver accountability, the cycle of human rights violations, abuse and turmoil is likely to escalate.

Excessive force by the security forces

The security forces have continued to use excessive force, including unnecessary lethal force, to disperse protests. Since 3 July 2013 alone, 1,400 people have been killed in political violence, most after security forces forcibly dispersed protests by Mohamed Morsi's supporters. In the bloodiest incident, security forces killed at least 550 people when they used excessive force to disperse Morsi supporters at Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo on 14 August 2013. Despite the scale of the bloodshed that day, not one member of the security forces has faced sanction, criminal investigation or formal charges.

Impunity

Three years after the "25 January Revolution", impunity for human rights violations remains the rule. Most human rights violations since the uprising have never been investigated and prosecuted and measures taken by the authorities to deliver truth and justice have proven toothless. A fact-finding committee appointed by President Mansour lacks the mandate to properly investigate human rights violations or to establish individual criminal responsibility for them. Furthermore, the committee does not have powers to compel government bodies to co-operate with it or to make its findings public. The authorities have appointed a new minister for transitional justice, but he has lacked the mandate and resources to work effectively and has publicly stated that the time is not right for transitional justice. The Prosecution has not effectively investigated the killings of hundreds of protesters by the security forces since 3 July.

Since the 2011 uprising, investigations have failed to bring any senior official or security officers to justice for their roles in deliberately killing or injuring protesters. The authorities have suppressed the findings of the fact-finding bodies appointed to investigate human rights violations. Egypt's new

Constitution enshrines impunity for human rights violations by giving military courts continued jurisdiction over crimes linked to the armed forces.

The Egyptian authorities' unwillingness to investigate human rights violations should not go unchallenged by the international community. Amnesty International urges the Human Rights Council, its members and observer states to call on the authorities to take immediate action to deliver truth, justice and reparation for human rights violations. A key indicator of progress will be whether Egypt's investigations deliver accountability for the events of 14 August 2013 and the authorities make the findings of such inquiries public.

The Human Rights Council should also urge the Egyptian authorities to provide it with regular updates on progress in investigations and towards accountability. In the absence of tangible progress towards accountability in Egypt, the Council should consider alternative mechanisms to establish truth and accountability.

Crackdown on Mohamed Morsi's supporters

The security forces have led a sweeping crackdown on individuals perceived to be supporters of Mohamed Morsi, arresting thousands and detaining many without respecting their due process rights. Those detained include people who were peacefully expressing their opposition to the military. Some detainees have complained of torture or other ill-treatment by the security forces, and said authorities denied them adequate medical care in custody. Amnesty International urges the Council to press the Egyptian authorities to allow independent monitoring of prisons and other places of detention.

Amnesty International is also concerned at ongoing political violence, including attacks by armed groups. The organization condemns indiscriminate attacks, as well as attacks targeting civilians. However, the authorities are using the deteriorating security situation as a pretext to repress all forms of perceived opposition, including those who use lawful and peaceful means of protest. The Egyptian government has the right and duty to protect lives and prosecute those responsible for crimes, but they must not sacrifice human rights in the name of "countering terrorism". The government is also drafting counter-terrorism legislation which, if adopted, could impose further arbitrary restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly and erode fair trial safeguards. In practice, the authorities are likely to use any new counter-terrorism powers to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood. The authorities designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a "terrorist organization" in December 2013, but have not produced evidence linking it to the recent spate of attacks.

Widening restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly

In the months after 3 July 2013, the circle of repression has widened to encompass opposition activists, journalists and human rights activists.

The authorities have restricted freedom of expression. Journalists and media workers who have reported on abuses or criticized the authorities have faced harassment, arrest and trial on accusations of spreading false rumours and belonging to banned terrorist groups. The authorities have also closed down television stations known for their support of Mohamed Morsi.

The authorities have continued to suppress the work of human rights organizations. The government restricts the registration, funding and activities of civil society organizations, and it is drafting legislation that would further constrain freedom of association. On 18 December 2013, security forces raided the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights, arresting its staff and volunteers and subjecting them to ill-treatment.

The authorities have imposed new restrictions on freedom of assembly. A new protest law gives the Interior Ministry sweeping powers over demonstrations. The security forces have used the law to forcibly disperse protests staged by Mohamed Morsi's supporters, as well as other opposition and human rights movements, and to arrest and detain protesters.

Amnesty International urges the Human Rights Council to call for the release of all prisoners of conscience in Egypt, those detained solely for peacefully expressing their human rights to expression and assembly. They include activists Alaa Abd El Fattah; Ahmed Douma and Ahmed Abdel Rahman; 6 April Youth Movement founder Ahmed Maher; and journalists Peter Grete, Mohamed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed.

The organization further urges the Council to call on the Egyptian authorities to charge others detained as part of the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood with recognizably criminal offences and give them fair trials in line with international standards, or release them.

Discrimination against women and Coptic Christians

Women and Coptic Christians have faced a rising tide of violence and discrimination amid the political turmoil.

Women protesters continue to face the threat of sexual violence, with over a hundred such attacks around Tahrir Square reported in the week of 30 June 2013 alone. Despite the level of violence, and the fact that attacks regularly take place during protests, the authorities have taken little action to stop or investigate them, or to bring those responsible to justice.

Coptic Christians faced an unprecedented level of violence after the Rabaa al-Adawiya dispersal; sectarian attacks left four dead and 200 Christian properties and 43 churches damaged. The Egyptian authorities said the attacks were “terrorism”, yet failed to ensure adequate, impartial and independent investigations – including into the security forces’ failure to prevent and stop the violence. Despite government promises, victims have not received reparation and damaged churches have yet to be rebuilt. Amnesty International also notes continuing sectarian rhetoric against Coptic Christians from some supporters of Mohamed Morsi.

Lack of response by the Human Rights Council

Amnesty International urges the Human Rights Council to express its deep concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt. The organization notes its disappointment that the situation has yet to be the subject of formal discussion or action in the Council, despite the scale of violations.

As an immediate measure, the organization urges the Council to call on Egypt to facilitate the visits of UN special procedures, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment; and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.