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PUBLIC STATEMENT

Federal Republic of Germany Death of Sudanese Asylum-seeker

Amnesty International today expressed concern about the tragic death of Aamir Ageeb, a 30-year old Sudanese asylum-seeker, who died on the evening of 28 May 1999 during an attempt to forcibly deport him from Frankfurt am Main airport, Germany. Amnesty International is extremely concerned that Aamir Ageeb may have died as a direct or indirect result of his treatment by three officers of the German border police.

Amnesty International believes that it is the responsibility of the German government to ensure that deportations are carried out in accordance with international standards and in a manner which respects the human rights of the deportees.

Aamir Ageeb was escorted by three police officers to Frankfurt am Main airport on the evening of 28 May, to be put on a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to Cairo and then on to Khartoum. Before departure Aamir Ageeb's arms and legs were reportedly bound by the police officers and a helmet placed on his head when he resisted deportation. After he was placed in a seat by the police officers, he allegedly continued to struggle. The police officers are then reported to have forced the detainee's head between his knees and kept him in this position until the aeroplane had taken off.

After take-off Aamir Ageeb stopped struggling and was pulled upright by the police officers. When the helmet was removed from his head the police officers noticed that he had stopped breathing. Several doctors on the aeroplane attempted in vain to revive him.

Amnesty International believes that unless legislation and regulations are enacted to provide safeguards that a deportee's inherent dignity is respected, there is no guarantee that deaths like that of Aamir Ageeb will not recur.

The human rights organization has written to the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany expressing its concern about the use of the restraint techniques used in the case of Aamir Ageeb. The organization is particularly concerned about the use of the helmet during his forced deportation and the force exerted on him during take-off.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated on 30 May that helmets are employed by the authorities to protect the deportee from physical injury during their forced deportation and to protect police officers from being bitten. Amnesty International has asked to be informed of the type of helmets employed during forced deportation and the guidelines relating to their use. The organization is especially concerned that the use of a full-faced helmet with a face visor could impede the breathing of a deportee. Similarly, a helmet strap could cause breathing difficulties if fastened too tight. The organization believes that breathing difficulties might be exacerbated in cases where a deportee struggles and resists deportation.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the technique of restraining a deportee in the sitting position by forcing the upper body forward onto, and below, the knees. The organization believes that this technique may impede the breathing of a deportee, especially when pressure is exerted and other restraints are employed. The human rights organization has asked to be informed whether this technique is permitted as a form of restraint, and if so, under what circumstances. In addition, Amnesty International has asked to be informed what guidelines exist relating to the use of this technique and other forms of restraint.

Amnesty International welcomes the announcement that an investigation will be held into the circumstances surrounding this tragic death and hopes that the investigation will be full and impartial. It has asked to be informed of the findings of investigation. The organization also welcomes the announcement that there will be a temporary suspension of forced expulsions from Germany.

Background

The death of Aamir Ageeb is not the first case of an asylum-seeker having died after being restrained during forced expulsion at Frankfurt am Main airport. In August 1994 a Nigerian national, Kola Bankole, died of heart failure during his forced deportation from Frankfurt am Main airport. He was restrained, sedated and gagged with a device made by one of the police officers at home from socks and a belt from a window blind.

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