

AI Index: PRE 01/396/2010
30 November 2010

Egypt parliamentary election violence must be investigated

Amnesty International today called on the Egyptian authorities to fully investigate the deaths, violence and other human rights abuses that marred last Sunday's parliamentary elections.

At least eight people are reported to have died and scores more wounded across the country as Egyptians went to the polls to elect members to the lower house of parliament, the People's Assembly. Two people are reported to have been killed by security forces in Assyout and Wadi Natroun in circumstances which remain unclear but which may have involved the use of live fire when dispersing crowds.

The other deaths are believed to have been the result of clashes between rival political parties.

"The Egyptian authorities must now open independent investigations into the deaths and allegations of violence that have, once again, cast a bloody shadow over Election Day," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Egyptian voters should have been able to rely on the security forces to ensure their safety not pose a threat to it."

Amnesty International is concerned that Egyptians turning out to vote were subjected to violence and intimidation during election day, including beatings by security forces, and other violence as revealed by mobile phone footage posted on the internet.

Footage also appears to show voters caught in the middle of violent clashes between supporters of rival candidates mostly belonging to the banned Muslim Brotherhood and the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP).

"The Egyptian authorities must not ignore the damning footage of violence and intimidation that is emerging," said Malcolm Smart.

"They must give clear instructions to their security forces to protect voters and uphold their rights, and that of candidates, without discrimination during the runoff voting on 5 December – if further violence and human rights abuses such as those that occurred on Sunday are to be avoided."

The Muslim Brotherhood, the largest organized political opposition to the ruling NDP, has said around 180 of its members and supporters were arbitrary arrested.

Representatives of Egyptian human rights organizations were effectively barred from monitoring the voting by security forces, despite holding permits issued by the High Elections Commission (HEC), the official body charged with supervising the elections. Some human rights monitors were reportedly assaulted by security officials.

Despite this, the HEC said late on Sunday that the elections had been "calm and orderly" with only

limited instances of violence.

Egyptian human rights organizations are currently documenting the violence that occurred on election day. They have established a task force, hosted by El Nadim Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, to investigate and verify reported incidents of violence. Local NGOs also formed the Egyptian Coalition for Monitoring Elections and the Independent Coalition for Election Monitoring, to monitor the conduct of the election and voting.

On Sunday, voters reported that they found some polling stations closed for several hours, while at other polling stations, security forces turned voters away. Journalists covering the elections for Ahram Online, Al-Dostour, Al Jazeera and el-Youm el-Saba'a newspaper say they were harassed and in some cases arrested by security forces.