

AI Index: PRE 01/256/2010  
26 July 2010

## **Egypt authorities must ensure witness protection in police brutality trial**

The Egyptian authorities must ensure witnesses called in the trial of two police officers accused over the beating to death of a man outside an Alexandria internet café are protected against possible reprisals, Amnesty International said today.

The trial of the officers over the death of 28-year-old Khaled Mohammed Said is to begin on Tuesday amid fears that those who give evidence against the police could be at risk.

“The Egyptian authorities must ensure that the witnesses to the assault on Khaled Mohammed Said are provided with all possible protection both to ensure their own safety and as a means of encouraging other witnesses to come forward,” said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme.

Two officers from Sidi Gaber Police Station in Alexandria face charges of harsh treatment, beating and torture of Khaled Mohammed Said, and unlawful arrest. They have not been charged with direct responsibility for his death.

If convicted, they could face between three and 15 years’ imprisonment.

An official autopsy is said to have concluded that Khaled Mohammed Said died of asphyxiation as a result of swallowing a plastic roll full of drugs and that the injuries sustained during his arrest did not cause his death.

However, these findings have been widely questioned amid accusations that they are part of an attempted cover up by the Ministry of the Interior.

The independent, non-governmental Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, has called for a new autopsy to be conducted by an independent pathologist.

Independent international forensic experts found the autopsy carried out on the body of Khaled Mohammed Said did not comply with the minimum international standards for forensic autopsies and contained numerous deficiencies.

“The referral for trial of the two police officers accused of assaulting Khaled Mohammed Said shortly before his death is a welcome first step towards breaking the cycle of impunity that has for so long facilitated torture and abuse of suspects by police in Egypt,” said Malcolm Smart.

“Yet, if justice is to be done in this case, the Egyptian authorities must ensure that the witnesses to the

beating as well as the dead man's family and those working to bring out the truth are protected from threats, violence and intimidation, and feel able to freely testify in court.”

Witnesses now fear to come forward, lawyers say, after one of Khaled Mohammed Said's friends, Tamer El-Sayyed Abdelmoneim, was attacked by nine people brandishing knives on 20 July.

They told him to end his involvement and 'interference' in the investigation into Khaled Mohammed Said's death and threatened to render him 'useless' if he did not. The nine slapped and beat him, leaving him with a swollen ankle, and took his wallet.

He told Amnesty International: “I am not scared. What happened to Khaled was unjust and this is the least I can do ... The problem now is that after I was attacked some potential witnesses are scared to come forward. They say if this happened to you and you are only gathering information, then what will happen to us if we speak out.”

The death of Khaled Mohammed Said has prompted widespread public protests in Egypt, where the police and other security forces have a long record of torture and abuse of suspects.

“It is vital that in cases of this nature, where police officers are alleged to have used violence against suspects in their custody, that the Egyptian authorities take all possible steps to ensure justice,” said Malcolm Smart.

“For far too long, some police officers and security officials in Egypt have acted as if they believe themselves to be above the law, which has bred a culture of injustice and impunity. It is high time that this was brought to an end, once and for all.”