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EGYPT: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR PROMPT THOROUGH AND IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATIONS INTO ALL CASES OF TORTURE AND DEATHS IN CUSTODY

Deaths in custody are on the increase in Egyptian police stations and prisons. At least 26 people have died in detention so far this year, Amnesty International said.

In releasing a new report, the organization singled out al-Wadi al-Gadid Prison as having the highest numbers of death in custody. More than 2000 political detainees have been transferred to this prison since it opened early this year in the desert, west of Asyut.

The brutalizing climate at al-Wadi al-Gadid Prison is such that, according to reports, on their arrival, detainees are given "*Hafl al-Istiqbal*" (welcome party). This means that they find two rows of security officers waiting for them and have to crawl on their hands and feet, while the officers keep beating them with sticks until they arrive in their cells.

"Torture and ill-treatment, together with poor hygiene, overcrowded cells, poor diet and absence of basic medical facilities caused or contributed to most of these deaths," Amnesty International said in a report issued today.

The human rights organization, concerned by the increasing number of deaths in custody, claims that the systematic use of torture and ill-treatment which takes place immediately after arrest in the Headquarters of the State Security Investigations Department in Lazoghly Square and in police stations, now takes place even in prisons. This has been facilitated by keeping detainees in prolonged incommunicado detention.

Most of those who died were suspected members or sympathizers of banned Islamist groups such as *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* and *al-Gihad*. Some of them had been held without charge or trial for several years, while others, tried and acquitted by state security or military courts, were kept in illegally prolonged detention, sometimes for as long as 22 months.

In most cases, families of the dead have reportedly not been given copies of any medical and autopsy reports or even death certificates. Some were not even told of the cause of the death.

The Egyptian authorities continue to claim that all allegations of torture and deaths in custody are officially investigated. However, Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the methods of such investigations and their full findings are not made public, contrary to the requirements of international standards. Sixteen months have now elapsed since the death, reportedly following torture, of the lawyer 'Abd al-Harith Mohammad Madani and the findings of the official investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death have yet to be made public.

"All detainees should be treated humanely and have access to their families, lawyers and medical doctors at all times. The conditions of detention should meet internationally agreed minimum standards," the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International urges the Egyptian Government to live up to its international obligations and act decisively to end human rights violations.

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