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PUBLIC STATEMENT

EGYPT

Government fails to end torture

Two years have now elapsed since the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT) published a report on torture in Egypt and made recommendations to the government to combat it, but the government has failed to stop the systematic use of torture against detainees.

In May 1996 the UN Committee, which monitors compliance with the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, issued a report summarizing the processes of a confidential inquiry carried out since November 1991 and concluded that *"torture is systematically practised by the Security Forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence..."*.

The Committee urged the Egyptian Government to *"make particular efforts to prevent its security forces from acting as a State within a State, for they seem to escape control by superior authorities."* It recommended that the Government set up *"an independent investigation machinery...that should efficiently examine all the allegations of torture, in order to bring them expeditiously before the courts..."*. The Committee also urged the Government to set up a *"thorough investigation into the conduct of the police forces..."*.

Despite these recommendations, no concrete measures have been introduced by the Government to stop torture. Torture of detainees continues to take place in the headquarters of the State Security Investigations Department (SSI) in Lazoghly Square, SSI branches elsewhere, police stations and Firaq al-'Amn (Security Brigades), where detainees are held incommunicado.

The most common methods of torture reported are the use of electric shocks, beatings, suspension by the wrists or ankles, extinguishing of cigarettes on the body, and various forms of psychological torture and ill-treatment, including threats of rape or sexual abuse of the detainee or of his female relatives in front of him.

Amnesty International continues to receive reports of torture being carried out against detainees. The most recent case is that of Wahid Ahmad 'Abdallah, aged 24, who died in April allegedly as a result of torture. Late in the evening of 8 April a number of security men, reportedly led by the head of the SSI in Bilqas, near al-Mansoura north of Cairo, stormed the house of Wahid Ahmad 'Abdallah and arrested him. This was without any arrest warrant and without informing him or his family of the reasons behind his arrest. He was taken to the SSI building in Bilqas and a few hours later his dead body was returned to his family. According to members of his family, there were clear marks of torture on different parts of his body.

On 4 January Mohammad Hussein Mohammad Ibrahim Sallam, an Egyptian Christian convert, was arrested at Cairo Airport. He and his British wife had been living in Lebanon for 12 months. He was reportedly tortured during the first two days of his detention in the Gaber Ibn Hayyan branch of the SSI in Giza. SSI officers reportedly beat Mohammad Sallam with their fists and feet for several hours while he was blindfolded and also threatened him with rape. He said that SSI officials also threatened that they would divorce him from his wife and that they would prevent him from leaving the country. He was released on 9 January.

No independent body to investigate allegations of torture has been set up by the Egyptian Government. In November 1993 a Human Rights Unit was set up within the Public Prosecutor's Office, headed by the Assistant Public Prosecutor. The Unit is charged with investigation of reports of torture and other human rights violations. Despite the hundreds of complaints lodged with the Unit by lawyers, acting on behalf of their clients, and local human rights groups, particularly the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, no prompt and impartial investigations are known to have been conducted.

Neither Amnesty International nor Egyptian human rights groups are aware of any investigation into the conduct of members of the SSI who have been named by the victims of being responsible of their torture. The Government continues to deny that the SSI is involved in human rights violations.

Four years have now elapsed since the death reportedly following torture of lawyer 'Abd al-Harith Mohammad Madani. The outcome of the investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death, which the government said was being carried out, has yet to be published. ENDS.../