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EGYPT - @TEN YEARS OF TORTURE

Torture continues to be a hallmark of Egypt's state of emergency - now completing its 10th year - with political activists, their relatives and even young people being brutally abused by security forces, Amnesty International said today.

"The government dismisses these abuses as the exception rather than the rule," the human rights organization said, "but the simple fact that the torture toll keeps mounting year after year makes it clear that this abuse is indeed systematic."

The organization said that since the state of emergency was declared in October 1981 it had interviewed scores of torture victims and received hundreds more testimonies from people who were tortured for days or even months while detained under the state of emergency, in most cases without ever being charged or tried.

Egyptian courts have acknowledged that torture takes place by making awards in scores of compensation claims from torture victims, even though the torturers themselves were not identified or brought to justice.

Many torture victims have been stripped, blindfolded and hung by their wrists from doors or windows; others have suffered electric shocks and some have been sexually abused or they or their relatives have been threatened with murder or rape.

In one case, a man who is deaf and mute was reportedly beaten over a period of three months, Amnesty International said, by interrogators who tried to make him speak.

Amnesty International has also received forensic medical reports in the last year following medical examinations of people arrested after the assassination of the former speaker of the People's Assembly, Dr. Rifa'at al-Mahgoub, in October 1990. Those reports backed up the victims' claims that they had been beaten, had cigarettes extinguished on their body, and been given electric shocks.

Other victims include a 17-year-old girl and a 15-year-old boy, both of whom said they were tortured last year to force them to give information about suspected political opposition activists.

Amnesty International said that most of the victims are alleged members or sympathizers of Islamic groups, or their relatives, but that many people with no political ties whatsoever have also been tortured after being picked up in the waves of arbitrary arrests that have followed outbreaks of political violence in the country. Such people have included manual workers, medical doctors, teachers, lawyers, journalists and office clerks.

"It's clear that with a pattern of arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detention that can go on for weeks on end, virtually everyone must be considered at risk of torture," Amnesty International said.

Some of the victims have been tortured to make them confess to taking part in assassination attempts on leading or former political figures or to pass on information about friends or relatives to security forces.

Amnesty International knows of only one case in the early 1980s of security, police and prison officials being prosecuted for torturing political detainees - more than 40 officials were brought to trial and acquitted in 1988.

Many torture victims have told Amnesty International that they didn't make formal complaints to the authorities about their torture because they didn't believe that they would actually be investigated; others said they were afraid of reprisals.

"The Egyptian government has ratified a number of major international human rights agreements, including the Convention against Torture," Amnesty International said. "But the fact that torture continues unabated, and that little is done to investigate the allegations or bring the torturers to justice raises serious doubts about the government's commitment to ending human rights violations in the country."

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