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Egypt: Protect families of those killed in protests from intimidation

Amnesty International is calling on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that families of individuals killed during the recent anti-government demonstrations are protected from intimidation and reprisals.

The call comes after Amnesty International received reports that some members of the Egyptian security forces have intimidated victims and their families following the overthrow of President Mubarak to prevent them seeking justice and making complaints about the forces' actions during the unrest.

Amnesty International documented many reports of similar behaviour during President Mubarak's rule, when the Egyptian authorities did little to prevent it.

"The Egyptian authorities must now do everything in their power to protect individuals and their families who have faced reprisals from the security forces," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Egyptians must know that reports of intimidation will be investigated and that those behind the recent violence will be brought to justice.

"Amnesty International is therefore also urging Egyptian authorities to take special measures to assist those seeking information to help them determine what happened and who should be held responsible."

Relatives of Mohamed Mostafa Abdou El Sayed, a 19-year-old university student who was shot and killed by security forces on 28 January, told Amnesty International they were recently confronted by a police officer and a number of thugs outside their home in El Gomrok, a working-class area of Alexandria.

The police officer pressured the family to abandon their efforts to seek justice and to instead accept financial compensation. He warned the family that he would return for further "negotiations".

The family had submitted a complaint to El Anfoushi Police Station and the Public Prosecutor in Alexandria accusing police officers at El Gomrok Police Station of killing their son.

They want to see those who shot Mohamed Mostafa, as well those who ordered security forces to use live ammunition against protesters, to be brought to justice.

Despite the intimidation, the family remains undeterred in its resolve to seek justice. They have presented a complaint with the country's Public Prosecutor in Cairo.

"The family of Mohamed Mostafa Abdou El Sayed must have justice, not intimidation," said Philip Luther. "Egyptians are looking for a clear signal from the authorities in Cairo that they no longer have to

fear the threats of the security forces.”

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Egypt is obligated to provide victims of human rights violations with access to truth, justice, and adequate reparation, including but not limited to financial compensation and guarantees of non-repetition.

“If the Egyptian authorities are serious about human rights reform, the security forces’ regime of fear must be brought to an immediate end,” said Philip Luther. “The promises of change must be realized and human rights for all Egyptians must be respected.”

Background

Massive peaceful protests took place across Alexandria on 28 January 2011, including in Caid Ibrahim and El Mansheya Square, in central Alexandria, in El Sa’ah Square in east Alexandria, and in El Agamy, west of Alexandria. In some instances, the protests turned into violent confrontations between security forces and protesters, generally after security forces employed force against protesters.

An Amnesty International fact-finding delegation, which visited Alexandria between 20 and 22 February 2011, found that security forces used excessive, and at times lethal, force against protesters, including those who were not posing an imminent threat to their lives or the lives of others.

Security forces used water cannons, tear gas, buckshot, rubber bullets and live ammunition against protesters. Some protesters behaved violently, attacking public and private property associated with repression and corruption, such as police stations and local authorities’ buildings, and members of the security forces, using rocks, and in rarer instances petrol bombs. However, the security forces used force disproportionately, and resorted to firearms when it was not strictly necessary. Bystanders, people in the vicinity of protests, and those helping the injured were also among those killed and injured. The vast majority of deaths and injuries involved residents of working-class neighbourhoods.

According to official medical sources from the largest hospital and central morgue in Alexandria, at least 54 people were killed during the protests in Alexandria. Amnesty International believes the figure to be higher than 80.