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Human Rights Leaders Call for Action by Egyptian Authorities

There must be a full, impartial and effective investigation into the shocking loss of life that has taken place in Egypt over the last week, with full accountability for whoever committed or ordered the unwarranted lethal crackdown, said Amnesty International's leaders from across the globe as they came together in Berlin today.

“The interim government has already stained its human rights record – first by breaking its promises to use non-lethal weapons to disperse pro-Morsi sit-ins and allow for the safe exit of wounded and then by justifying their actions despite the tragic loss of lives,” said Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

“The response of the international community has been weak and ineffective, even as everyone leaps to condemn the horrific loss of life. The international community must act decisively to send a message that no government can behave this way and retain any credibility.”

“Even if violence was employed by some of the pro-Morsi protesters, that could never justify such a disproportionate response. It should also not be used as a pretext to crackdown on all supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, without making a distinction between those using and inciting violence, and those simply expressing their opinion. In what country could the security forces act in such a brutal and reckless fashion without taking decisive action?”

Leaders from across Amnesty International's global movement have gathered in Berlin this week for their bi-annual International Council Meeting. One of the first actions of this meeting of human rights leaders, activists and volunteers was a public gathering of all participants to call on the Egyptian government to stop the use of excessive or unnecessary force and initiate independent and impartial investigations. A petition was then submitted to the Egyptian Embassy in Berlin.

“As we come together from around the world as members of a global movement to discuss the core human rights issues of the day, it is important that we take a moment to mark the terrible loss of life that took place in Egypt last week,” said Selman Caliskan, Director of Amnesty International in Germany.

“That hundreds of people across Egypt could be killed by the security forces - as well as thousands injured - in just a few days defies belief. Nothing less than a comprehensive investigation can ensure justice for the victims and accountability for the perpetrators.”

Since President Morsi was deposed on 3 July, Amnesty International researchers in Egypt have been highlighting a string of serious human rights abuses, culminating in the wholesale attack by the security forces on the pro-Morsi sit-ins. These abuses have included an alarming and unprecedented rise in sectarian violence against Coptic Christians across the country, seemingly in retaliation for their support for Morsi's ouster. Coptic Christian activists documented over 60 attacks on churches since the violent dispersal of pro-Morsi sit-ins amid the failure of security forces to effectively intervene to stop the violence.

Amnesty International has also documented abuses by pro-Morsi protesters, including beatings, torture and killings. In recent days, the scale of violence by some Morsi supporters have manifestly increased, as some attacked government buildings and police stations and personnel. Some protesters have also fired live ammunition on local residents, including children, and suspected opponents. Protesters using violence should be held responsible for criminal acts.

“The Egyptian authorities have a very poor track record in holding members of the security forces to account for using excessive, and unwarranted, lethal force so UN experts – especially the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions – must be given access to the country to investigate the circumstances of the violence and the pattern of excessive and unwarranted lethal force,” said Salil Shetty.

“A clear violation of international law and standards has been carried out in Egypt in what can be described as no less than utter carnage. The Egyptian authorities must take immediate action to prevent further loss of life, while bringing security and public order back to the streets,” said Salil Shetty.

Additional Information:

The death toll rose to more than 800 protesters and bystanders since the violent dispersals of pro-Morsi sit-ins on 14 August 2013. Officials at the Ministry of the Interior told Amnesty International that 69 members of the security forces also lost their lives.

In the aftermath of Wednesday’s violence, Amnesty International researchers in Cairo have been working to verify what human rights abuses have been carried out. They have been gathering evidence from hospitals and field hospitals in Cairo, as well as the city’s Zeinhum morgue and a mosque temporarily housing dozens of the dead. They have documented scores of deaths, and eyewitness reports from medical staff who described how many of the injured and dead had sustained bullet wounds to the upper body.