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Egypt: Rule of law elusive without confronting army and police abuses

President Mohamed Morsi has a historic opportunity to tackle the bloody legacy of police and army and guarantee that no one is above the law in Egypt, Amnesty International said in two new reports published today.

Under the rule of the army, a raft of human rights abuses took place, including live ammunition being turned on demonstrators.

The reports document unlawful killings, excessive use of force, torture and other ill-treatment against protesters by both the military and the police and are based on first-hand field investigations carried out during the rule of Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

[Brutality unpunished and unchecked: Egypt's military kills and torture protesters with impunity](#) highlights patterns of violations at three key demonstrations, and documents the brutal crackdown unleashed by the army during the 16-month rule by the SCAF..

It focuses on:

- The Maspero protests of October 2011, when 27 mainly Coptic Christian protesters were killed;
- Events outside the Cabinet Offices in December 2011, when 17 protesters died;
- The Abbaseya sit-in in May 2012, when up to 12 people were killed.

The report describes in detail cases how the army acted above the law, under the rule of the SCAF. The military courts failed to provide any redress for the victims, while civilian investigators were unable or unwilling to indict a single officer for their crimes.

“Unless the soldiers responsible for killing, maiming and abusing protesters are put on trial in front of an independent, civilian court, there is no hope that the victims will see justice or that soldiers will fear punishment if they repeat such crimes,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme.

Male and female protesters were subjected to severe beatings, given electric shocks, sexually threatened and abused by military troops. Thousands were tried or face unfair trial before military courts. Women protesters were singled out for abuse, and months later have been left with mere excuses by the SCAF, instead of independent investigations and redress.

In July, President Morsi set up a committee to investigate all killings and injuries of protesters during the period of military rule; the committee was given limited time to come up with a report. Amnesty International believes it should be given enough time, resources and power to summon witnesses and officials and access information to identify the perpetrators.

The second Amnesty International report, [Agents of repression: Egypt's police and the case for reform](#),

outlines the total impunity enjoyed by the three main police forces in Egypt – the Central Security Forces (CSF), widely known as the riot police; the General Investigations Police, Egypt’s national police force; and the abolished State Security Investigation (SSI) service, highlighting the urgent need for sweeping reform of the police force.

The report focuses on three key events:

- Police violence during clashes with protesters at Mohamed Mahmoud Street near the Ministry of Interior in November 2011
- Police abuses during protests in the same street following the killings of Al-Ahly football club supporters in February 2012.
- Police violence during clashes in front of Nile City Towers, in Cairo, in August 2012.

The report highlights the brutal response by the police to protests, as well as the longstanding pattern of torture of detainees and the brazen disregard of the rule of law that characterizes the police’s conduct.

“The endemic abuses by police have continued since the uprising. The police needs root and branch reform to eradicate entrenched abusive behaviour, including thorough vetting of current officers, suspension pending investigations of those accused of violations, and independent civilian oversight bodies.”

The riot police have routinely responded to peaceful protests with excessive and lethal force, including disproportionate use of tear gas, beatings and arbitrary arrest. They fired shotgun pellets, rubber bullets and live ammunition into the crowds, killing, blinding and otherwise injuring demonstrators.

Tear gas and shotgun ammunition were among the US-made weaponry supplied to Egypt’s police forces before and after the uprising. Amnesty International called for a halt to all transfers of tear gas, small arms, including shotguns and light weapons, until adequate safeguards were put in place by the Egyptian authorities to prevent further violations by security forces while policing protests.

“The different Interior Ministers that headed the police force since last year’s uprising have repeatedly announced their commitment to reforming the police and respecting human rights, but so far reforms have merely scratched the surface.. Instead, they have tried to restore emergency-like legislation in the name of restoring security” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

Amnesty International sent a detailed memorandum to President Morsi in July urging him, among other things, to put reform of the police and security institutions at the heart of his government’s agenda, creating transparency and ensuring accountability.

“Major reforms are needed to rebuild public trust in Egypt’s police forces, whose brutality was one of the main triggers of the uprising. Key to this is creating a police force which has recruitment, training and operational practices firmly rooted in international human rights standards, and subject to independent oversight.”

Without bringing to justice security forces responsible for human rights violations, justice for the victims will remain elusive. Only accountability for past abuses and meaningful reform can ensure security forces will not act above the law.