

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Egypt: Amnesty International calls for inquiry into killings and opposes threatened collective expulsions of Sudanese protesters

Amnesty International is calling on the Egyptian government to launch immediately a thorough, independent, and impartial investigation into the killing of at least 27 Sudanese protesters by Egyptian police on 30 December, as well as the injury of dozens more, and to halt the deportation without due process of law of any of the protesters back to Sudan. The organization said such investigation should be conducted with the participation of UN human right experts and members of independent Egyptian human rights organizations. Amnesty International is urging the Egyptian authorities to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions to take part in this investigation.

The killings occurred during clashes between Egyptian police and a group of protesters as the police sought to forcibly disperse a three-month peaceful sit-in of Sudanese refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in Mustafa Mahmoud Park near the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Muhandessin area of Cairo. The police reportedly applied water cannons directly on protesters and subjected them to indiscriminate beatings. The police action left at least 27 Sudanese dead, including women and children, and many others injured.

Amnesty International considers that international standards require that the investigation should look into abuses by the police, including all deaths, and the circumstances surrounding them, as well as the alleged pattern of excessive or unnecessary use of force. Amnesty International said the independence and impartiality of the investigation would be strengthened by the participation of international experts. The Egyptian government should ensure that all those officials responsible for committing, ordering or failing reasonably to prevent any human rights violations should be brought to justice. They also should ensure that victims or their families receive adequate reparation.

Amnesty International is also calling on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that police comply with international standards governing policing activities, including the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, and receive adequate training on fundamental human rights, in particular those protecting the rights to life and to physical and mental integrity of all individuals, among other rights.

Protesters were forcibly removed from the park and taken to various detention centres outside Cairo in public transportation buses. The authorities reportedly released all those in possession of identification documents but continue to detain others.

Amnesty International said the Egyptian authorities should release all Sudanese nationals detained during or following the events of 30 December unless they are to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence.

The Egyptian government should also ensure that all those held have full access to lawyers and their families and receive adequate medical treatment, if needed.

Amnesty International is also concerned at the announcement made by Egyptian authorities that up to 650 Sudanese nationals are about to be deported to Sudan; they reportedly include asylum-seekers and may possibly include refugees recognized by UNHCR who were not carrying their identification documents at the time of their arrest. The organization is calling on the Egyptian authorities to halt all such deportations immediately and to ensure that no individual at risk of serious human rights abuses is deported to Sudan, in accordance with Egypt's obligations under international human rights law, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the customary international norm of non-refoulement. Amnesty International calls on the Egyptian authorities to give unhindered access and adequate time for UNHCR to assess the need of those individuals for international protection. In addition, any deportation of individuals found not to be in need of international protection must be reached in accordance with law; a collective expulsion would violate Article 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that non-nationals may be expelled "only in pursuance of a decision reached in accordance with law."

Background

On 29 September 2005, several hundred Sudanese refugees started a protest in a park opposite the Mustafa Mahmoud Mosque, in the Mohandissen area of Cairo, near the offices of UNHCR. The protestors, who included asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants, were demanding improvements in their living conditions, protection from return to Sudan, and resettlement in a European or North American country, among other demands.

By the end of December, the number of demonstrators had exceeded 2,500 and the Egyptian authorities indicated that they intended to relocate the refugees to the outskirts of Cairo. On the evening of 29 December, police forces surrounded the area while last minute negotiations reportedly took place, involving leaders of the demonstration and officials from the Ministry of Interior. At around 3.30 am on 30 December, the police forces started using water cannons to disperse the demonstration and subsequently beat the demonstrators.