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Sweden: Deportations leave men at risk of torture in Egypt

Amnesty International today condemned the deportation of two Egyptian men by the Swedish authorities.

Muhammad Muhammad Suleiman Ibrahim El-Zari and Ahmed Hussein Mustafa Kamil Agiza were forcibly returned to Egypt by the Swedish authorities on 18 December. In Egypt both men are at grave risk of torture and unfair trial. Their whereabouts are unknown and they are feared to be held incommunicado. Both have said that they have been tortured while detained in Egypt in the past.

"The Egyptian government must ensure that the men are not tortured. They must also be treated humanely in detention and be given regular access to lawyers of their choice," Amnesty International said.

Furthermore, Amnesty International remains concerned that Ahmed Hussein Mustafa Kamil Agiza's wife and five children have been denied refugee status in Sweden in an unfair procedure, and may also be at risk of forcible return. The organization is urging the Swedish authorities not to forcibly return them to Egypt, and to ensure that their claims for protection will be examined in a fair asylum procedure.

Muhammad Muhammad Suleiman Ibrahim El-Zari has been described in various international publications, including the Arabic daily newspapers *al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *al-Hayat*, as a member of an armed Islamist group. He has denied this, and stated that he is an activist for a non-violent Islamist opposition group in Egypt.

Ahmed Hussein Mustafa Kamil Agiza has denied allegations by the Swedish Security Police (*Säpo*) that he is a member of an armed group. He had been one of 107 people charged with membership of the Islamist armed group *al-Gihad* (Holy Struggle) in an unfair trial before the Supreme Military Court. In April 1999 the court sentenced him *in absentia* to 25 years' imprisonment. Such trials of alleged members of armed Islamist groups before military or (Emergency) Supreme State Security courts are grossly unfair.

The Swedish government recognized both men as having a well-founded fear of persecution in a decision on 18 December 2001. However, the government excluded them from protection on the basis of connections to organizations which had been responsible for acts of "terrorism". The government made its decision on the basis of secret evidence provided by the Swedish Security Police which was not disclosed in full to the men and their legal counsel.

The Swedish government held that the men would not be at risk of serious human rights violations in Egypt, on the basis of written guarantees from the Egyptian authorities. Amnesty International is concerned that these written guarantees are an insufficient safeguard, that the Swedish government is in breach of its obligations under international refugee law and human rights law not to send anyone back to a country where they risk serious human rights violations such as torture.

"Sweden must respect its international obligations: the Swedish government must not forcibly return anyone to a country where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations," Amnesty International said.

Background

In Egypt suspected members of armed Islamist opposition groups are frequently tortured, particularly at the State Security Intelligence (SSI) headquarters in Lazoghly Square, Cairo, but also other SSI branches, at police stations and occasionally prisons. The methods most commonly reported are electric shocks, beatings, suspension by the wrists or ankles, burning with cigarettes, and various forms of psychological torture, including death threats and threats of rape or sexual abuse of the detainee or their female relatives. Despite hundreds of complaints of torture reported by lawyers and local human rights groups to the Public Prosecutor's Office, no impartial investigations are known to have been conducted.

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