



CAIRO INSTITUTE
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مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

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Human Rights in Egypt

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies draws the attention of the Human Rights Council to the excessive and lethal violence unleashed by the Egyptian state and to the state's failure to protect Egyptian citizens from serious sectarian violations. While we denounce acts of intimidation and violence committed by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as a political group and its supporters, we firmly assert that such acts justify neither lethal force by the state nor collective punishment of protestors.

The State's Excessive Use of Force

On August 14, security authorities used excessive force to disperse the two sit-ins held by the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters in Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo governorate and in Nahda Square in Giza governorate. This violence resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of serious injuries; dozens of bodies were torched under circumstances which remain unclear. What is clear is that the security apparatus could have avoided such excessive human losses if it had agreed to comply with international standards for the dispersal of assemblies, including those adopted by this Council.

In the weeks leading up to the dispersal of these sit-ins, the security authorities also failed to take the necessary measures under the law to ensure public security and to protect citizens. Weapons and ammunition were allowed to enter the sites of the two sit-ins, and killings, torture, and physical assaults on journalists occurred with impunity in these two areas. However, the fact that some participants at the sit-ins possessed weapons, committed criminal acts, or engaged in violence does not justify the collective punishment of all of the protestors by the security apparatus or its use of excessive – and often lethal – force in dispersing the gatherings. Indeed, the policies and practices adopted by the authorities in dealing with these two sit-ins since the removal of President Morsi on July 3, including the manner in which the protests were dispersed, represent an utter

failure to apply the rule of law and to respect citizens' rights, including the right to life.

In addition to the excessive force employed by the state, it is important to note that following the dispersal of the sit-ins, members and supporters of the MB in Cairo and other governorates attempted to storm several government facilities and police stations, killing a number of officers. Rights groups have documented approximately 1,600 deaths as a result of the ongoing violence since August 14, both at the hands of the Egyptian military and police as well as Islamist groups and mobs.

The State's Failure to Protect Citizens from Violence

Islamist leaders have been fomenting sectarian strife for years, and such rhetoric continued unabated through the anti-Morsi demonstrations of June 30 and the removal of President Morsi (of the MB's Freedom and Justice Party) on July 3. The sectarian violence which broke out as a result was sanctioned by the MB both by their refusal to condemn these crimes and by the continued use of sectarian rhetoric used by the group's leaders, including on the stage at the sit-in at Rabaa al-Adawiya Square.

Despite this threat, the Egyptian authorities have repeatedly neglected to provide the necessary protection to Coptic Christian citizens and their property and places of worship, to decisively confront sectarian attacks, and to enforce the law by holding those responsible for these acts to account. Churches across Upper Egypt and Sinai have been attacked, leading to the destruction and arson of several of them, and Coptic Christian citizens continue to be threatened with further physical violence in several cities and towns.

For instance, in the eastern town of Beni Ahmed, located in the governorate of Minya, the state institutions and security forces blatantly refrained from intervening to put an end to the sectarian tensions which had been on the rise for a full month between the town's residents, who are mostly Christians, and supporters of ousted president Mohamed Morsi from the surrounding villages. This negligence led to residents from these villages surrounding and attacking Beni Ahmed on August 3. Clashes broke out between the two sides, yet the police did not intervene until over two hours later. Although police did secure the town's church, they neglected to prevent attacks on private property, including homes, cars, and shops.

It is also reported that a large number of Christians from northern Sinai have been displaced, as they have been forced to flee the continual threats to their lives. Churches have remained closed most of the time due to fears that they will be attacked, as they are not provided sufficient protection by the military or the police. Coptic Christians have also been targeted for killings and kidnappings at the hands of Islamist extremists in Sinai; for example, both the priest Mina Aboud

Sharoubim and Coptic citizen Magdi Lamaai were killed, the latter after his family was unable to pay the ransom demanded in return for his release. Mina Matry Shouqi was also abducted, yet he was released after his family paid the required ransom.

Furthermore, the authorities did not make adequate preparations to contain the violence which was expected to be carried out by the MB and its supporters in response to the dispersal of the sit-ins – despite the fact that public incitement to sectarian violence as well as acts of retaliatory violence against Copts in several governorates had begun several weeks before. When it was announced that the two sit-ins were being dispersed, at least 45 churches were simultaneously attacked, leading to the deaths of seven citizens, the burning of 25 churches, and the looting and destruction of seven more.¹ Other property belonging to Copts, including schools, was also attacked.

Attacks on the Media

Further worrying is the manner in which freedom of expression and press freedoms have been restricted since July 3, when President Morsi was ousted. Since then, the Egyptian authorities have taken exceptional measures against Islamist media outlets, including through the closure of five satellite channels after breaking into their offices and detaining their staff in unknown locations – all without court orders. The second printing of an issue of the official newspaper of the MB's Freedom and Justice Party was also confiscated.²

Violations against journalists also occurred during the dispersal of the two abovementioned sit-ins on August 14 and during the subsequent clashes which took place throughout the country. Between August 14 and August 18, four journalists were killed, three disappeared, ten shot by live ammunition or rubber bullets, and twelve detained. Security forces damaged the equipment of numerous journalists. Sixteen journalists were also attacked by civilians.³

On August 20, Tamer Abdul-Raouf, a journalist with Al-Ahram newspaper, was shot and killed by the army while he was driving his car after curfew following a meeting with the governor of El-Behiera. Tamer was accompanied by his friend Hamed El-Barbary, the head of Al-Gomhoreya newspaper office in El-Behiera,

¹ See statement by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, <http://eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2013/08/25/1791>.

² See CIHRS' statement on violations against the press: <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=6913&lang=en>

³ See the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression's statement: http://www.afteegypt.org/control_program/2013/08/18/1061-afteegypt.html

who was also injured and had to be hospitalized. Following this incident, El-Barbary now faces dubious accusations of possessing arms.⁴

Urgent Need to Establish Rule of Law and Accountability

The Cairo Institute fears that the increase in politically-motivated and sectarian violence, and the resulting threat of civil war, may lead the Egyptian authorities to take further exceptional measures in the name of protecting public security and combating terrorism. Instead, the state should immediately adopt a serious plan to contain the violence using peaceful and political means and return to the political process outlined in the government's roadmap for Egypt's democratic transition. We again remind the authorities of the need to avoid the mistakes made by previous governments since the 2011 uprising, particularly their decisions to ignore demands for security and political reform and above all political integration of all Egyptian groups in the political process.

We further call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately investigate the tragic death toll that has accompanied the June 30 uprising. Such an investigation should precede any political process if the government wishes to demonstrate its genuine commitment to a meaningful political solution. We specifically call for an impartial and independent investigation into the many deaths which occurred on August 14 as well as the burning of dozens of corpses during the dispersal of the sit-in.

We insist that the public prosecution must fulfill its duty to also prosecute those responsible for crimes of sectarian violence and to bring them to trial. We demand an investigation into all incidents of incitement to religious hatred, violence, torture, killing, and attacks on journalists and the prosecution of any persons involved in these crimes. We further emphasize the need to provide adequate protection to witnesses to such crimes, as some who have testified recently have faced intimidation and acts of retribution, including abduction and torture, thought to have been carried out by Islamist groups.

We call on the Human Rights Council to urge Egypt to immediately extend an open invitation to all UN mandate holders to visit the country in order to assess the current human rights situation in the country and to assess the response of the state to demands for accountability and truth seeking.

We call on the High Commissioner to present an oral update and a comprehensive report to this Council - with input from relevant special procedures mandate holders as appropriate - to be followed by a discussion on the degree of promotion and respect of human rights in Egypt.

⁴ See the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression's statement:
http://www.afteegypt.org/control_program/2013/08/22/1063-afteegypt.html