

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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December 16, 2016

To Nabil Sadek
Prosecutor General
Arab Republic of Egypt

Dear Sir,

We write to you to inquire about serious events that happened in Borg al-Arab Prison in Alexandria from November 12-19, 2016. Human Rights Watch interviewed the families of four inmates as well as two lawyers and one human rights activist. Our research, as well as several media reports, indicated that prison security forces, probably with enforcement from the Interior Ministry's Central Security Forces, stormed into prison cells, beat tens of political prisoners, and used tear gas and pepper spray against them. The families and lawyers alleged that some prisoners suffered severe burns and fractures. Security forces also allegedly stripped the inmates of all of their essential belongings, such as utensils, hygiene products, and clothes and seized inmates' medicines.

We would greatly appreciate any information regarding what steps your office has taken to investigate these allegations and to hold accountable any prison officials or security personnel who may have been responsible for abusing prisoners.

The families of inmates alleged that the events began when inmates objected to poor and humiliating treatment inside the prison, especially of death row inmates. The families said that when they were able to visit their relatives in the prison, they saw them wearing torn clothes, with bruises and signs of beatings and burns. One father of an inmate claimed his son could not recognize any member of his family when they visited him. Authorities then transferred at least 250 inmates to other prisons; namely, Gamasa, Minya, and Wadi al-Natroun prisons, far from where their families live, which the

families viewed as a punishment. Families also reported that their relatives were transferred to the new prisons without any of their belongings, and that some of them were handcuffed and blindfolded and were then subject to beating again upon arrival to the new prisons. Families also said that security officers at the new prisons violated their rights to visitation, especially in the first two family visits after the transfer, by limiting visit times to as little as five minutes, behind barbed wires, and with no privacy.

Lawyers and families we interviewed claimed that members of the prosecution did not want to acknowledge receiving the complaints families submitted during the week of November 12 until tens of relatives gathered outside al-Manshiya Court in Alexandria. Only then did prosecutors invite them to provide their testimonies. The sister of one inmate claimed that the prosecutor who met with her initially refused to write down in his notes the names of officers she alleged were involved in the mass beating, among them the warden of Borg al-Arab Prison and officers Emad al-Shazly, Amr Omar, and Sameh al-Serafy, who are all part of the Investigation Division of Borg al-Arab Prison. After she insisted, she said, the prosecutor agreed to write down their names.

Some families alleged in complaints to the prosecutors, which Human Rights Watch has reviewed, that the head of the Interior Ministry's Prisons Authority supervised the abuse of inmates. Can you inform us if these allegations are being investigated, and if so, by persons independent of him?

The lawyers for Borg al-Arab inmates told Human Rights Watch that prosecutors twice visited the prison to question inmates, but the lawyers said they were not aware of any further steps taken by members of the prosecution to guarantee a timely, open, and transparent investigation. Lawyers said that the prosecutors did not visit transferred inmates in Minya, Gamasa, or Wadi al-Natroun prisons. Lawyers said they were also not aware of prosecutors calling any officers for interrogation. Moreover, prosecutors rejected or ignored requests from inmates to be examined by the Justice Ministry's Forensic Medical Authority. Prompt medical examinations are essential in such cases to determine if abuse occurred.

We urge you to take all measures possible to ensure a transparent and fair investigation into these serious allegations and that all inmates get the appropriate medical treatment and access to forensic medical examinations.

As noted, we would appreciate any information your office can provide regarding the incidents in question and alleged abuse. In order for us to reflect that information and the perspective of your office in any report that Human Rights Watch might issue, please respond no later than December 20. You can reach me by email ([REDACTED]) or fax ([REDACTED]). You can also contact my associate [REDACTED] by email ([REDACTED]) or phone ([REDACTED]). Thank you in advance for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Joe Stork
Deputy director
Middle East & North Africa division
Human Rights Watch