

31 March 2011

**Letter from Human Rights NGOs to Officials on Security and Health  
Situation in Egyptian Prisons**

**Letter addressed to:**

The Prime Minister, Doctor Essam Sharaf

The Minister of Interior, General Mansour Al Eisawy

The Interior Minister's Assistant for Prisons, General Nazih Mahfouz

**Copy sent to:**

The Supreme Military Council

**Subject: Dangerous security and health situation in Egyptian prisons**

On behalf of seven human rights organizations, we would like to bring to your attention the dangerous security conditions and the terrible health and hygiene situation in a number of Egyptian prisons. The undersigned organizations have received consistent accounts from several prisons, including al-Qatta al-Gedid prison in Giza, Shebin el Kom prison in Monofia and the Tora prisons complex, indicating that prisoners' safety and health has been jeopardized and continues to be at risk.

Therefore, we call upon the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Interior and the Minister's Assistant for Prisons to strengthen and accelerate their efforts to take all necessary measures to restore safety and security inside Egyptian prisons, as well as to improve the health and hygiene situation.

The undersigned organizations are worried that prisoners are not safe within their cell-blocks, as prison guards are not present inside the prison buildings. The organizations have received information from al-Qatta prison and Shebin el Kom prison that guards do not enter prison buildings to secure prisoners' safety. Some guards are present at the visitors' room, outside of the cell-blocks, during visiting hours. Apart from that, officers remain on the towers at all times. This has led to several violence incidents between prisoners, the latest of which resulted in the death of prisoner Ibrahim Fathi on 18 March in al-Qatta prison during a fight between prisoners. While partial solutions have been implemented in some prisons, for example the separation of prisoners according to their area of origin in different blocks in Shebin el Kom prison, such solutions must be accompanied with the full presence of prison guards inside prison buildings to prevent any further violence.

The security problem is exacerbated by two issues that must be investigated and addressed immediately. The first is the smuggling of knives and drugs in abundance inside some prisons, in particular Shebin el Kom prison and al-Qatta prison. According to the prisoners,

some officers are involved in the smuggling of drugs and knives to prisoners. The second issue is the poor conditions of living, which we have documented in all three prisons. In addition to deplorable hygiene conditions, food is distributed in meager quantities and left for prisoners to pick up at the block door. This increases the likelihood of fights erupting between prisoners.

The health and hygiene situation is also very worrying. Prisoners report that garbage is not collected and fills the blocks. Toilets are in appalling conditions and flies fill the rooms. This situation is likely to lead to the spread of disease.

In addition, prison hospitals, which are not equipped to deal with severe injuries, are full of injured prisoners who are not receiving the health care they need. The undersigned organizations reached information from the Liman Tora prison hospital that as many as a hundred prisoners who were injured by live fire while in detention during the first days of the revolution, are now in the hospital. Many of those need to be transferred to outside hospitals for surgeries but severe delays in the transfer leads to the deterioration of their condition, and sometimes their death.

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we call on the Prisons Authority and the Ministry of Interior to restore full presence of prison guards in prison buildings at all times, to secure the safety of prisoners. We also call upon the Ministry and the Prisons Authority to investigate and instigate disciplinary measures against any officer proven to be involved in selling or facilitating the smuggling of drugs or knives to prisoners, as well as to guarantee that food is delivered to prisoners in sufficient quantities every day.

In addition, we appeal to the Prisons Authority to take urgent action to ensure the prompt referral of those prisoners who need it to outside hospitals, as well as to accelerate the procedures for health release of prisoners with severe injuries or grave chronic illnesses. Moreover, we urge the Authority to instruct the administration of each prison to collect garbage regularly and restore appropriate hygiene conditions in all cell-blocks.

We believe you will give this issue the due attention it deserves, and we are willing to provide you with any further information you might need.

**Signatory Organizations:**

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights  
Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression  
El Nadim Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture  
Hisham Mubarak Law Center  
New Woman Foundation  
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies  
Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights