

Egypt: Detainees in Abu Zaabal Prison to hold general strike due to overcrowding and human rights abuses

A leaked letter from detainees at the Abu Zaabal prison, situated approximately 30 km northeast of Cairo, has brought to light severe violations committed against them. The detainees warn that these violations may lead to a widespread strike within the prison, similar to recent strikes in Badr, Minya, and Burj Al-Arab (Al-Gharbaniyat) prisons.

According to the leaked letter seen by the undersigned rights groups and campaigns, the prison administration blatantly disregards the internal regulations established by the Egyptian Prison Service. Instead, they employ a deplorable approach of mistreatment towards the detainees, creating an environment devoid of any meaningful dialogue.

One of the primary concerns expressed by the detainees at Abu Zaabal prison is the alarming overcrowding of the cells. The number of detainees in a single cell has surged to an astonishing 45, compared to the previous count of 33 during the summer. Consequently, each detainee has been left with a mere 40 cm of space to sleep, often resorting to the floor.

The detainees attribute this distressing overcrowding to the Ministry of Interior's practice of transferring a large number of individuals undergoing interrogation within Greater Cairo (encompassing Cairo, Giza, and Qalyubia governorates) to this particular prison. The proximity of Abu Zaabal prison to the capital, where the offices of the Public Prosecution and major courts are situated, contributes to this influx of detainees.

According to the leaked message, the situation inside Abu Zaabal prison has worsened with the arrival of summer. Not only has the prison administration increased the number of inmates in each cell, but they have also failed to provide a consistent and adequate supply of drinking water and water suitable for human use. As a result, the detainees have been plagued by skin diseases, suffocation due to high temperatures, and a lack of proper ventilation within the cells.

In their letter, the detainees emphasize that these conditions have compelled them to declare a collective strike in order to secure their basic human rights. They highlight their unsuccessful attempts to engage in dialogue with the prison administration regarding the reduction of overcrowding and improvement of living conditions. The administration's response, claiming that the matter is beyond their control and lies with higher authorities, has left the detainees without any resolution. They demand that no additional detainees be sent to the prison until their concerns are addressed, yet there has been no response to their plea thus far.

The undersigned organizations and campaigns stress that the conditions described in the leaked letter from Abu Zaabal prison are not surprising. They assert that these conditions align with the broader pattern exhibited by the Egyptian authorities in their treatment of detainees, particularly those of a political nature. The systematic nature of these violations contrasts with the Ministry of Interior's attempts to portray them as isolated incidents.

The undersigned organizations and campaigns strongly believe that the culture of impunity within the Egyptian authorities has fostered and perpetuated these practices of human rights violations within their detention facilities. The lack of accountability and consequences for the

perpetrators has allowed these practices to flourish and become ingrained within the Egyptian Prison Service. Despite consistent and well-documented violations that may have occurred, no leaders or officials have faced punishment or even reprimand.

Therefore, the undersigned organizations and campaigns express deep concern for the well-being of detainees, particularly in light of the recent rise in deaths within detention facilities and the deteriorating living conditions amidst the general economic crisis in Egypt.

In light of these grave concerns, the undersigned organizations and campaigns call for a thorough investigation into these violations and for those responsible to be held accountable in accordance with both Egyptian and international law. They stress the importance of adhering to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, the Egyptian Prison Regulations, and putting an end to their violations. Additionally, the provision of dignified living conditions for detainees is paramount.

Furthermore, the undersigned organizations and campaigns urge the Egyptian authorities to halt security-driven approaches in handling detainees involved in political cases. They also call for granting international and local human rights organizations the right to visit these detention facilities and monitor the conditions inside. They emphasize the vital role of the Egyptian prosecution in addressing these violations and emphasize the need for it to take decisive action to halt and deter all perpetrators.

The issue of detention centers, prisons, and the violations occurring within them in Egypt has become a ticking time bomb, not only for the Egyptian authorities but also for the international community that witnesses everything happening within these facilities while remaining silent and inactive towards the suffering victims.

The only solution to defuse this bomb is to take serious and firm action to address the violations in Egypt's detention centers and prisons, rather than ignoring them as is currently the case.

Signatories:

- Committee for Justice (CFJ)
- El Shehab Center for Human Rights (SHR)
- Egyptian Network for Human Rights
- Arab Foundation for Civil and Political Rights-Nedal
- Their Right
- We Record