

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Date: 3 May 2019 index number: MDE 12/0305/2019

EGYPT: OSAMA MURAD'S ATTEMPTED SUICIDE IN TORA PRISON HIGHLIGHTS THE ABSENCE OF ADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE IN PRISONS

Allegations of ill-treatment against a prisoner who attempted to commit suicide at Tora Reception Prison in Egypt must be subject to an effective, independent investigation without delay, Amnesty International said today.

Osama Murad, a 40-year old man who is serving a 10-year prison sentence on charges of “membership in a terrorist organization”, attempted to commit suicide at Tora Reception Prison at around 12pm on 22 April. According to Osama Murad’s family, the night before his suicide attempt, prison guards subjected him to beatings in his cell and gave him an injection to sleep. He woke up the next day, went to the bathroom and cut his neck with a sharp object.

Since then, Osama Murad has been receiving treatment in the intensive care unit of El Manial Specialized University Hospital and has undergone several surgeries. His condition remains critical.

Amnesty International is concerned that security forces have prevented Osama Murad from receiving family visits since his attempted suicide and calls on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that his family is allowed to visit him at the hospital in line with Egypt’s international obligations and with Article 37 of the Egyptian Prison Law (396/1956) which stipulates that prisoners with grave medical conditions are allowed to receive exceptional visits. Further, the organization is calling on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that all decisions concerning Osama Murad’s healthcare be taken solely by the relevant healthcare professionals without interference from prison officials or security agencies. If Osama Murad is returned to prison, he must be granted adequate and timely specialized medical and psychological care.

According to Osama Murad’s family, his mental health has gradually deteriorated in prison, following his conviction in September 2016. During this period, Osama Murad started to suffer from convulsions, psychosis and fainting, according to the family. His family said that he had not suffered any mental illness or depression before his arrest in May 2015. The Court of Cassation ordered his retrial in 2017 and the Cairo Criminal Court upheld the 10-year prison against him in 2018 which led to a sharp worsening of his mental health.

The fact that the authorities changed his place of detention six times since his arrest in 2015 has also negatively affected his wellbeing. "Every time he got to know his co-detainees, he was transferred to another prison", said his family.

Given the absence of adequate psychological care inside prison, his family was compelled to seek a psychiatrist's opinion outside prison. They reported his symptoms to a psychiatrist who diagnosed his mental health conditions and prescribed his medicine accordingly. More recently, Osama Murad met a prisoner who agreed to take care of him and give him his medication on time. Two weeks after the latter was transferred to another cell, Osama stopped his medication and experienced several panic attacks.

Egyptian and international human rights organizations have had longstanding concerns about inadequate medical care and medical negligence in Egyptian prisons. According to a [study](#) on healthcare provision in 16 Egyptian prisons and police detention centers conducted by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) in 2014, "none of the prisons had any systematic program for psychological or social rehabilitation, and there was no social worker to offer support or psychological advice to prisoners". Since then, Dr. Aida Seif El-Dawla, a psychiatrist and co-founder of [El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture](#), confirmed that the situation may even be worsening, and that "prison authorities often punish prisoners with mental health issues and mistreat them". EIPR’s study also highlighted the lack of independence of medical opinion within the system of detention. Although all

doctors are members of the Doctors' Syndicate, prison officials often interfere in decisions related to the health of prisoners.

Amnesty International has documented cases where [prisoners](#) have died in recent years due to the failure of authorities to provide them with adequate and timely medical care. According to the Al Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, at least 105 prisoners died in different prisons and police stations between January and October 2017, of whom at least 41 died because of medical negligence.

In its [2016 report on abuses in Egypt's Scorpion Prison](#), Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that National Security and Prisons Authority officers regularly interfere with the prisoners' medical treatment, by flouting doctors' instructions to provide prisoners with specialized healthcare outside prison or by returning prisoners to prison before the end of their treatment.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Egypt is legally obliged to respect, protect and fulfil “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” Under Rule 24 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Egypt is further obliged to provide prisoners “the same standards of health care that are available in the community” and without discrimination. The Mandela Rules also provide that prisoners who require specialist treatment must be transferred to specialized institutions or outside hospitals when such treatment is not available in prison.

Amnesty International is calling on the Egyptian authorities abide by international human rights law and standards in their treatment of all detainees and prisoners, including those with mental health issues. The authorities should also ensure the independence of the medical staff in detention centres and prisons, and establish an independent, effective competent body authorized to conduct inspections, encompassing healthcare provision, in all places of detention including through unannounced visits.