

التحالف العربي لمناهضة عقوبة الإعدام

The Arab Coalition Against the Death Penalty

Press release

10 September 2018

Egypt sentences 75 to death in grotesque mass trial

On 8 September 2018, the Cairo Criminal Court handed down 75 death sentences, 47 life sentences, and prison sentences of up to 15 years to 612 other defendants for their participation in sit-in protests at the al-Nahda and Rabaa al-Adawiya squares in Cairo on 14 August 2013.

Among those who were convicted is award-winning photojournalist Mahmoud Abu Zeid, also known as “Shawkan”, who was sentenced to five-year imprisonment after he was arrested while covering the deadly dispersal of the sit-ins by security forces. Having already spent five years in pre-trial detention, Shawkan is expected to walk free in a matter of days. Other defendants covering the events were convicted, such as Al Jazeera journalist Abdullah Elshamy who was sentenced to 15-year imprisonment *in absentia*.

The sit-ins had been organised in support of Egypt’s first democratically-elected President since the “Arab Spring”, Mohamed Morsi, who was overthrown by the army a month before. According to Human Rights Watch, about 85.000 protesters joined the sit-ins, which extended for over 45 days and grew larger and more organised with time. On 14 August 2013, security forces under the command of then-General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt’s current President, raided the two protesters’ camps in an operation that led to the death of more than 900 protesters and six security officers. Human Rights Watch described the raids as “one of the world’s largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history”, likely amounting to crimes against humanity.

Following what is now widely known as the “Rabaa massacre” and despite evidence implicating the Egyptian army and police in killing the protesters, not a single security officer was brought to justice. However, hundreds of protesters were arrested in what constitutes a politically-motivated move.

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The mass trial of 739 protesters was slammed by Amnesty International as “a grotesque parody of justice”. The defendants were collectively prosecuted for security-related offenses including murder, damage to property, membership of a banned group, and illegal gathering. Prosecutors failed to submit evidence demonstrating the individual criminal responsibility of each of them. It is also alleged that the defendants were subjected to torture and police brutality in pre-trial detention. The Rabaa mass trial constitutes a stark reminder of the two mass trials conducted against Morsi supporters in 2014, where 529 (later reduced to 37) and 683 defendants were sentenced to death as a result of proceedings marked by gross irregularities.

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS), along with the Arab Coalition Against the Death Penalty (ACADP) and the Jordanian Coalition Against the Death Penalty (JCADP) strongly condemn the Egyptian authorities’ practice of conducting mass trials, the use of torture and police brutality, and the issuance of death sentences under any circumstances. The ACHRS, ACADP, and JCADP call for the immediate and unconditional release of all those who have been convicted for protesting peacefully as well as for the retrial, in line with international standards on fair trial, of defendants suspected of having committed violent acts.

The ACHRS, ACADP, and JCADP call onto the international community to voice their concerns against Egypt’s gross violations of universal human rights, including the right to life, the right to freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and the right to a fair trial.

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