

EGYPT: 'PEOPLE WERE DYING ALL AROUND ME'

TESTIMONIES FROM CAIRO
VIOLENCE ON 14 AUGUST
2013

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INTERNATIONAL



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CONTENTS

Introduction5

Testimonies.....7



INTRODUCTION

At about 6.00am on 14 August 2013 the security forces carried-out operations to clear two pro-Morsi sit-ins in Greater Cairo, ongoing since 28 June 2013. The dispersal came after repeated threats by the authorities to remove the protesters, who they said were “terrorists” endangering “national security”.

The smaller sit-in in al-Nahda, by Cairo University, was cleared with relative ease after a couple of hours, with clashes quickly spreading to other parts of Giza, and continuing late into the night. However, the operation to disperse the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in took about 10 hours, with protracted clashes documented from at least three entrances to the sit-in, and in surrounding side-streets, in some cases about 1.5 kilometres away from the radius of the main sit-in area.

As of Friday morning, Egypt’s Health Ministry reported 638 deaths across Egypt. Of these, 288 were in the Nasr City neighbourhood, the site of the main pro-Morsi sit-in at Rabaa al-Adawiya Square. This makes it the bloodiest single incident since the outbreak of the “25 January Revolution” more than two years ago.

Egypt’s Minister of Interior justified the security forces’ conduct, claiming that protesters used violence, and that 43 members of the security forces, including 18 officers, were killed across the country, with more than 200 injured. He claimed that the security forces provided warnings, and only used tear gas until they were fired upon by pro-Morsi protesters.

Some of Mohamed Morsi’s supporters did use violence, including firearms, and launched attacks on the Giza Governorate building, police stations and security personnel. Police stations in Waraq and Kerdassa were attacked, with police officers captured, killed and beaten. In several instances, members of the security forces were captured and beaten, and one grieving relative told Amnesty International that her cousin, a police officer, was decapitated in Giza on 14 August 2013.

Protesters at Rabaa al-Adawiya also told Amnesty International that they used rocks and Molotov cocktails and set police vehicles alight in an attempt to prevent the dispersal.

Previous page: mourners carry a coffin outside the morgue.





TESTIMONIES

*Previous page: Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque;
Above: A burned-out vehicle found around
the site of the violence*

A protester, who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisals, told Amnesty International that he was securing the Tiba Mall entrance to the sit-in when security forces moved-in at about 6am. He said that he saw at least two armoured vehicles and a bulldozer dismantling the make-shift barriers built by pro-Morsi supporters in anticipation of the dispersal. Based on their uniforms, he assumed that the security forces involved included members of the Central Security Forces (CSF) and Special Forces, both under the Ministry of Interior. He also claimed that two helicopters were flying overhead. He said that he heard a warning through a loudspeaker calling on protesters to vacate the area, but that less than a minute later, tear gas and shotguns were fired in their direction. He received minor shotgun pellet wounds to the shoulder. He claimed that the protesters responded with Molotov cocktails and rocks.

He described how the day unfolded:

"The situation continued like this until about 12pm. It was non-stop tear gas... and shots were coming from rooftops and the armoured vehicles... shots were raining down on us..."

tents around us started burning... I am afraid that those who did not get out of the tents on time burned to death inside... women, children, and the elderly sheltered either inside the mosque [Rabaa al-Adawiya] or stayed by the podium [on Nasr Street].

"After a short lull around 2pm, the firing resumed... by 4pm, security forces were advancing... at about 4:30pm, a bullet broke the window on the field hospital... I saw a woman being shot while running for shelter... I came under fire myself while carrying a 'martyr' [a person who had been killed] towards the hospital... It was all over by about 5pm, after they burned the podium, the field hospital, and the mosque."

Another protester described the start of the sit-in dispersal from the entrance on Al-Tayaran Street:

"At about 6am, three armoured vehicles approached us on Al-Tayaran Street... There were no verbal warnings, but a few shots were fired in the air... The only verbal warning that I heard all day was at 5pm, when we were told to leave the Square, after it was all over... on Al-Tayaran street, we resisted a lot, and managed to push them [the security forces] back at first... the area saw hours of street fighting... People were dying all around me from the early morning; I saw people shot in the head and chest... Shots were coming from surrounding rooftops and the security [forces] in the armoured vehicles..."

"At about 11.30am, something hit me and those standing next to me, and I felt immense pain burning, like I was on fire [he showed Amnesty International delegates burn marks on his hand and ear]... I quickly went back to the field hospital, where they just put some water on the wounds, and went back as there were far more serious injuries and many dead..."

"When I got back to Al-Tayaran Street, the tents were burning... I returned to fend off the attack from the Nasr Street entrance, but we were eventually overwhelmed, and people were falling all around me... visibility was difficult with the tear gas, and clouds of smoke... I left the Square along with the rest of the protesters. It was mainly women, children, and elderly men... We took the injured with us... I saw some people arrested as well."

A nurse present at the field hospital inside the sit-in throughout the clashes told Amnesty International that the first patients, suffering from shotgun pellet wounds and suffocation from tear gas, were received as soon as the dispersal started, while she documented the first injury from live ammunition at about 7.30am. She said that at about 10.00, they moved the field hospital from Hall 1 to Hall 3, adjacent to the mosque, as Hall 1 was engulfed in heavy tear gas, leaving some 40 bodies behind.

The situation worsened after 3pm:

"There were so many cases of both killed and injured that we lost count, at that stage all the doctors left to go to the main Rabaa Hospital as the number of patients there was overwhelming, and we had no capacity to deal with them in the field hospital... At about 5, there was a gun pointing at me through the window... There were three men, two in black uniforms and one in civilian dress... The one in civilian dress screamed at me, telling me to open the door, and asking if we had weapons inside... I pleaded with them that there were



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only injured and dead inside, and they did not enter inside.”

Above: Scenes at the morgue

She said that the injured and dead were eventually collected, mainly by private cars, at 8.00pm, but that many people had died as a result of delays in receiving appropriate medical treatment.

A doctor told Amnesty International of the difficulties experienced in providing people with medical care, given the inadequate equipment and security concerns. He explained:

“I was at the Rabaa Hospital until around 4.30, moving between the first four floors to treat people. On each floor there were dozens of dead bodies and hundreds of injured people. They mostly sustained live ammunition wounds to the upper part of the body. We could not treat all those who had been injured, especially those shot had been shot with live bullets, because we were not equipped. Some had been shot in the chest, back, head, legs and belly. I saw the Sky News reporter inside the hospital, shot in the chest. He was then transferred to another hospital. Mohamed el-Beltagy’s daughter, Asmaa Elbeltagy, was also there... She died later... There was another woman who sustained a live bullet to the head, I witnessed both.”¹

He also described the dire security situation, including shooting from the rooftop of buildings around the hospital. He said:

"They were shooting at the gate of the hospital. I realized this when I was called to go to the field hospital at about 4:30. I went out and a man securing the gate was shot in the head next to me. I ran to the field hospital. There were hundreds injured and dead. I stayed in the field hospital until 7.00 pm. Then I left along with the others because of attacks by the security forces... We headed to Iman Mosque. On our way, I saw a pick-up truck carrying around 20 bodies from Rabaa al-Adawiya in the direction of Iman Mosque. The bodies were charred [burned]."

Another medical student who stayed behind at the Rabaa al-Adawiya Hospital described the final moments before security forces entered:

"At around 5:00 pm, I heard noise downstairs. I was on the fourth floor. One of the doctors told us that the security forces were attacking the hospital. The doctors ordered us to close the curtains and windows to avoid the tear gas. I saw snipers on the roofs of buildings near the hospital; they were dressed in black. Then another doctor told us that the security forces had got into the first floor and were asking people to leave... The security forces then evacuated people outside of the hospital."

"The security forces allowed people to take the injured with them, however I cannot guarantee that all of the injured were allowed to leave or we had the capacity to transfer all the injured. I went up and tried to tell the security forces that we could not transfer all the injured, as the numbers were too high. One security officer hit me on the back with the butt of their rifle and pushed me towards the stairs. I got out of the hospital. The security forces then told us to take the bodies and patients. The first floor was on fire... I couldn't go back in, so I left with the rest towards Iman Mosque."

On 15 August 2013, Amnesty International researchers visited the Iman Mosque, which had been turned into a morgue, with bodies lying on the floor. Lists with names of 265 people were hanging of the walls of the Iman Mosque on 15 August 2013, with volunteers telling Amnesty International that two more bodies had also come in without identification. The bodies were brought in by relatives and their supporters from the vicinity of the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in, including the field hospital, hours after the sit-in was forcibly dispersed by the security forces. Most were brought in by private cars.

A member of the Health Directorate was present at the Iman Mosque providing documentation allowing for official burial. He was not conducting full autopsies, but, according to relatives, the documents provided indicated cause of death. Relatives of the dead were in a rush to bury them, particularly in light of the long wait at the Cairo Zeinhum morgue, understaffed and overwhelmed with extremely high number of casualties. Hours after Amnesty International researchers left the mosque, the security forces dispersed protesters and cleared it. It remains unclear where the remaining bodies were taken – according to those people who stayed at the mosque until the dispersal.



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Amnesty International researchers visited the site of the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in on 15 August 2013, where they examined the damage. Bullet holes were visible by the Tiba Mall back-entrance to the sit-in, and along Nasr Road. The researchers were prevented by military personnel from entering inside the field hospital area and the Rabaa al-Adawiya Hospital. The field hospital area, Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque, and surrounding buildings were visibly burned. Soldiers at the scene confirmed that the first floor of the Rabaa al-Adawiya hospital had also been set on fire, corroborating reports from doctors at the scene [see above]. Two additional burned bodies were uncovered in the vicinity, according to soldiers guarding the site.

Above: Scenes at Rabaa al-Adawiya

Other protesters were shot as they attempted to join the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in.

A pro-Morsi protester interviewed at the Salam Mosque on 14 August 2013 told Amnesty International that he had sustained shotgun pellet wounds to the legs by the Nouri al-Khattab Mosque as he was leading a march from Al-Tayaran Street towards Rabaa al-Adawiya at about 9.30am. He said that as they were walking up Al-Tayaran Street, they were confronted with rows of riot police. He claimed that those trying to get him to safety were themselves shot at.

A grieving wife told Amnesty International that her husband had left home at about 9.30am to join pro-Morsi marches headed towards Rabaa al-Adawiya in support of those at the sit-in. Thirty minutes later, the family received a call saying that he had been shot dead by the Ta'min al-Sihi Hospital, near Rabaa al-Adawiya. According to relatives and witnesses, another



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Above: Bodies at the mosque

42-year-old man was shot as he joined a march towards Rabaa al-Adawiya near Sikka al-Hadid.

Amnesty International delegates visited the Salam Mosque on 14 August 2013, where they found eight bodies. A protestor in the field hospital in the Mosque, which is near Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque, told Amnesty International that he had joined a march from Hay El-Asher in Nasr City at 9.00 am. He said the march reached Al-Tayaran Street at 10:00 where they found the security forces in armoured vehicles shooting tear gas and shotgun pellets. After around 45 minutes, they began shooting live ammunition. At 11.30, his colleague was shot in the chest and died. He also witnessed another man, who he said was a doctor, shot in the neck.

¹ Sky News cameraman Mick Deane was shot and killed in Egypt on 14 August 2013. The daughter of leading Muslim Brotherhood figure Mohamed el-Beltagy was also killed in the violence. See Sky News, "Sky News Cameraman Killed In Egypt", 14 August 2013: news.sky.com/story/1128530/sky-news-cameraman-killed-in-egypt

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