

Cairo, 9 January, 2006

The Honorable Ms. Louise Arbour
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Dear Ms. Arbour,

We are writing to you regarding the recent violent removal by Egyptian security forces on 30 December 2005 of Sudanese refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who had been participating in a peaceful protest in Mohandisin, Cairo since September 2005. The security operation, which resorted to water canons and indiscriminate beatings, resulted in the killing of 27 protestors according to official statements, while protest leaders and independent human rights monitors estimate the number of those killed to have reached over seventy.

While these deadly attacks were immediately condemned by the United Nations Secretary General and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), your Office has so far refrained from publicly commenting on the excessive use of force by Egyptian security forces.

The Egyptian government has consistently failed over the past years to conduct independent and impartial investigations into well-documented, serious abuses committed by security forces. The latest incident of such failure was the decision by the Public Prosecutor on 27 December 2005 to close the investigation into physical and sexual assaults on peaceful demonstrators and journalists on 25 May 2005 without assigning responsibility or issuing any indictments. Similarly, the Egyptian government has recently refused to investigate the violent repression of anti-war demonstrators in 2003; the widespread arbitrary arrests and torture of detainees in the context of investigating the Taba bombings in October 2004; the severe beating of peaceful demonstrators protesting President Mubarak's decision to rerun for Presidency on 30 July 2005; and the violence against, and intimidation of voters during the recent parliamentary elections in late 2005, which has left at least 16 voters killed.

These previous incidents, together with the statements of Egyptian officials which have consistently blamed the Sudanese protestors for provoking the violence and denied any responsibility on the part of security forces for the deaths and injuries, cast serious doubts on the ability or willingness of the Egyptian government to investigate this "terrible tragedy", in the words of the UN Secretary General, and to punish the perpetrators.

We welcome the priority given to establishing accountability and fighting impunity for human rights violations since your appointment as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and previously as chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. We are satisfied by the focus of your Office's Plan of Action on greater country engagement to close the "implementation gap", including through the rapid deployment of human rights staff when needed. We were also encouraged by your initiative to dispatch fact-finding teams to Uzbekistan and Togo in 2005 to investigate and report on human rights violations. We strongly believe that similar procedures are necessary for

responding to the 30 December killings and preventing similar abuses from occurring in the future.

We therefore strongly recommend that you urgently dispatch a fact-finding mission to Cairo to investigate the excessive use of force and other human rights violations committed by security forces and to make the findings of this investigation public. This investigation should also include the conduct of UNHCR. At a minimum, we request that you publicly condemn the killing of dozens of Sudanese protestors, and take steps to ensure that the Egyptian government fulfills its obligations under international human rights law to investigate these serious human rights violations, bring their perpetrators to justice, compensate the victims and halt any deportation without due process of law of any of the protestors back to Sudan.

Yours Sincerely,

Nadim Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Hisham Mubarak Law Center

Association for Human Rights Legal Aid

Arabic Network for Human Rights Information

Egyptian Association against Torture

Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies

Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression

Egyptian Center for Housing Rights

Egyptian Center for the Rights of Child

Civil Observatory for Human Rights