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The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt

SUMMARY AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In July and August 2013, many of Egypt's public squares and streets were awash in blood. On July 3, 2013, the military deposed Mohamed Morsy, Egypt's first elected civilian president and a high-ranking member of the Muslim Brotherhood, on the heels of massive popular protests against Morsy calling for early presidential elections.

Over the course of the following two months, Muslim Brotherhood supporters organized two large sit-ins in Cairo and smaller protests across Egypt to denounce the military takeover and demand the reinstatement of Morsy. In response, police and army forces repeatedly opened fire on demonstrators, killing over 1,150, most of them in five separate incidents of mass protester killings.



A ripped up poster that reads 'No to the Coup', in reference to the military's ouster of Morsy on July 3, 2013 lies in a pool of blood in Rab'a Square on August 15, 2013.

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Smoke rises over demonstrators congregated in front of the main stage at the center of Rab'a Square early on August 14, 2013, as security forces begin their forceful dispersal of the sit-in organized to call for the reinstatement of ousted president Mohamed Morsy. Human Rights Watch used satellite photography from one night of the sit-in, August 2, to estimate that there were approximately 85,000 protesters in the square that night. Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim estimated that there were "more than 20,000" demonstrators at the sit-in on August 14. © 2013 Private



Human Rights Watch's one-year investigation into the conduct of security forces in responding to these demonstrations indicates that police and army forces systematically and intentionally used excessive lethal force in their policing, resulting in killings of protesters on a scale unprecedented in Egypt. The evidence we examined includes on-site investigations at each of the protest sites during or immediately after the attacks were underway, interviews with over 200 witnesses, including protesters, doctors, journalists, and local residents, and review of physical evidence, hours of video footage, and statements by public officials. On this basis, Human Rights Watch concludes that the killings not only constituted serious violations of international human rights law, but likely amounted to crimes against humanity, given both their widespread and systematic nature and the evidence suggesting the killings were part of a policy to attack unarmed persons on political grounds. While there is also evidence that some protesters used firearms during several of these demonstrations, Human Rights Watch was able to confirm their use in only a few instances, which do not justify the grossly disproportionate and premeditated lethal attacks on overwhelmingly peaceful protesters.

Numerous government statements and accounts from government meetings indicate that high-ranking officials knew that the attacks would result in widespread killings of protesters; indeed, in the single largest incident, the Rab'a and al-Nahda dispersals, the government anticipated and planned for the deaths of several thousand protesters. One year later, security forces continue to deny any wrongdoing, and authorities have failed to hold a single police or army officer accountable for any of the unlawful killings.

August 14 Rab'a and al-Nahda Square Dispersals

The gravest incident of mass protester killings occurred on August 14, when security forces crushed the major pro-Morsy sit-in in Rab'a al-Adawiya Square in the Nasr City district of eastern Cairo. Using armored personnel carriers (APCs), bulldozers, ground forces, and snipers, police and army personnel attacked the makeshift



Armed personnel carriers (APCs) operated by the Egyptian police approach protesters assembled behind makeshift fences in Rab'a al-Adawiya Square in eastern Cairo on August 14, 2013. © 2013 Private

protest encampment, where demonstrators, including women and children, had been camped out for over 45 days, and opened fire on the protesters, killing at least 817 and likely more than 1,000.

Human Rights Watch researchers documented the dispersal of the Rab'a sit-in and found that security forces opened fire on protesters using live ammunition, with hundreds killed by bullets to their heads, necks, and chests. Human Rights Watch also found that security forces used lethal force indiscriminately, with snipers and gunmen inside and alongside APCs firing their weaponry on large crowds of protesters. Dozens of witnesses also said they saw snipers fire from helicopters over Rab'a Square.

While the government had declared and made public its plan to disperse the sit-ins by force, these warnings were insufficient. Government warnings in the media, and at

Rab'a Square itself, in the days before August 14 failed to specify when the dispersal would take place. Warnings on the morning of the dispersal were not heard by many and did not provide protesters sufficient time to leave before security forces resorted to forcible dispersal. The vast majority of the demonstrators interviewed by Human Rights Watch in connection with this event said they did not hear the looped pre-recorded warnings security forces played over loudspeakers near at least two of the entrances to the sit-in minutes before opening fire. Security forces then besieged demonstrators for most of the day, attacking from each of the five main entrances to the square and leaving no safe exit until the end of the day, including for injured protesters in need of medical attention and those desperate to escape. Instead, in many cases security forces fired on those who sought to escape, witnesses told Human Rights Watch.

The indiscriminate and deliberate use of lethal force resulted in one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history. By way of contrast, credible estimates indicate that Chinese government



An officer from the Egyptian Central Security Forces (CSF) takes aim at a crowd of retreating protesters as security forces disperse the Rab'a sit-in on August 14, 2013. © 2013 AFP/Getty Images

forces killed between 400-800 protesters largely over a 24-hour span during the Tiananmen Massacre on June 3-4, 1989 and that Uzbek forces killed roughly similar numbers in one day during the 2005 Andijan Massacre.

The dispersal of the Rab'a Square sit-in lasted 12 hours, roughly from sunrise to sunset. Police commenced their assault, in coordination with army forces, at around 6:30 a.m. by lobbing teargas canisters and shooting birdshot pellets at protesters located near the entrances to the square. They quickly, within minutes at some entrances, escalated to live fire, according to dozens of witnesses. Led by army bulldozers, police slowly advanced from each of the five major entrances to the square—two on Nasr Street, two on Tayaran Street, and one on Anwar al-Mufti Street behind the Rab'a al-Adawiya Mosque—in the early morning hours, destroying makeshift fences erected by protesters and other structures in their path. The advancing forces were supported by snipers deployed on top of adjacent government buildings. Many protesters retreated to the central area of the square for safety, but

some remained on the peripheries to hurl stones, Molotov cocktails, and fireworks at advancing forces.

Injured and dead protesters quickly filled the Rab'a hospital and makeshift facilities across the square, where volunteer doctors and other medical professionals, many themselves demonstrators, tended to serious injuries using basic donated equipment and medicine. Doctors in Rab'a hospital told Human Rights Watch that the vast majority of injuries they treated were gunshot wounds, many to the head and chest. Security forces from the morning fired at makeshift medical facilities and positioned snipers to fire on those who sought to enter or exit Rab'a hospital.

Security forces advancing on the ground as well as snipers deployed on top of buildings intensified fire over the course of the morning, until indiscriminate gunfire became prevalent at the entrances around 8 a.m. By 9-10

a.m., though, security forces had become bogged down by rock-throwing protesters at each entrance, who had positioned themselves strategically to minimize exposure to direct fire, and slowed their advance.

In the early afternoon, after a brief mid-day break when gunfire was less intense, security forces intensified their fire as they made their final advance into the heart of the square. Security forces killed many protesters in these final hours, with no part of the square protected from widespread gunfire. By around 5:30 p.m., police had encircled remaining protesters around the Rab'a mosque and hospital, located near the center of the square, and then forcefully took control of the hospital. At this point, they ordered the majority of those remaining, including doctors, to exit, with instructions to leave corpses and the injured behind. As the last protesters left the square, fires broke out on the central stage, the field hospital, the mosque, and on the first floor of Rab'a hospital. Evidence strongly suggests that the police deliberately started these fires. As the last protesters left the square, fires broke out on the central stage, the field hospital, the mosque, and on the first floor of Rab'a hospital. Evidence strongly suggests that the police deliberately started these fires. Security forces detained over 800 protesters over the course of the day, some of whom they beat, tortured and in some cases summarily executed, six witnesses told Human Rights Watch.

Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim alleged in a press conference on the night of the dispersal that the use of force by the police in both Rab'a and al-Nahda squares came in response to violence, including gunfire, from protesters. Human Rights Watch's investigation found, in addition to hundreds of protesters who threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at police once the assault began, demonstrators fired on police in at least a few instances. According to the official Forensic Medical Authority, eight police officers were killed during the Rab'a dispersal. However, the protesters' violence in no way justified the deliberate and indiscriminate killings of protesters largely by police, in coordination with army forces.

Extensive witness evidence, including from independent observers and local residents, establishes that the number of arms in the hands of protesters was limited. In In-



Bodies of protesters killed during the August 14 Rab'a dispersal lined up in Iman Mosque, near Rab'a Square, on August 15, 2013. By the end of the day, volunteers at Iman Mosque had catalogued 257 bodies, which had been brought from the square by family members and volunteers in the aftermath of the dispersal. © 2013 Amru Salahuddin



Injured protesters rest in a makeshift field hospital in Rab'a Square, where overwhelmed volunteer doctors tended to the hundreds of injured and dead protesters in the midst of August 14 dispersal of the Rab'a sit-in. Security forces besieged protesters for nearly 12 hours without safe exit, including for injured protesters in need of medical attention. © 2013 Mosaab al-Shamy

terior Minister Ibrahim's August 14 press conference, in fact, he announced that security forces had seized 15 guns from the Rab'a sit-in. In an August 18 speech, then-Defense Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said referencing the Rab'a dispersal that, "I am not saying everyone was firing, but it is more than enough if there are 20, 30, or 50 people firing live fire in a sit-in of that size." If the figure of 15 guns is an accurate representation of the number of protester firearms in the square, it would indicate that few protesters were armed and further corroborates extensive evidence compiled by Human Rights Watch that police gunned down hundreds of unarmed demonstrators.

Furthermore, police officers stood on top of APCs facing protesters and snipers operated from atop buildings in plain view for long periods of time, according to wit-

nesses and dozens of videos that Human Rights Watch reviewed of the dispersal, unlikely behavior if there had been a significant threat of gunfire from protesters.

Moreover, much of the shooting by police appears to have been indiscriminate, openly firing in the general direction of crowds of demonstrators instead of targeting armed protester gunmen who may have posed a serious threat. While Human Rights Watch cannot establish whether initial gunshots that day came from the security forces or armed protesters, interviews with over 100 witnesses, including local residents not sympathetic to the protesters, confirm that security forces resorted to widespread shooting from the first minutes of the dispersal, with APCs, bulldozers, ground forces, and rooftop snipers already in place.

On the same day as the Rab'a dispersal, August 14, security forces also dispersed a second smaller encampment of Muslim Brotherhood supporters in al-Nahda Square, near Cairo University in Giza in greater Cairo. The al-Nahda dispersal followed the same pattern as in Rab'a: at around 6 a.m. security forces demanded from



Volunteers in Iman Mosque, near Rab'a Square in eastern Cairo, on August 15, 2013 catalogue the bodies they received in the aftermath of the violent dispersal of the sit-in the previous day. By the end of the day, lists with 257 names were hung from the mosque's walls, all of whom had been among the at least 817 people killed during the Rab'a dispersal. © 2013 Amru Salahuddin

loudspeakers that protesters leave the square, but then, almost immediately, resorted to firing at protesters, including those attempting to leave from the designated "safe" exit. Witnesses described how police fired at protesters both deliberately and indiscriminately, using teargas, birdshot and live ammunition. As some protesters took shelter inside the Engineering Faculty Building at nearby Cairo University, further violence ensued, when security officers fired at protesters barricaded in the building. The Ministry of Health set the death toll for the dispersal of the al-Nahda sit-in at 87.

For weeks in the run-up to the August 14 dispersals, Interior Minister Ibrahim, then-Defense Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, then-Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawy, and other government officials stated that a forcible dispersal of the sit-ins was necessary. Officials maintained that the sit-ins disrupted residents' lives, increased traffic congestion, provided a forum for sectarian incitement and terrorism, and a locale for demonstrators to detain and abuse opponents, including some to death. Human Rights Watch interviewed local residents who catalogued the serious

effects the sit-in had on their everyday lives and reviewed evidence to suggest that some protesters detained and abused a number of persons they suspected of being infiltrators, possibly resulting in casualties.

However, these allegations fail to justify a forcible dispersal that resulted in the deaths of at least 817 people and amounted to collective punishment of the overwhelming majority of peaceful protesters. The mass killings of protesters were clearly disproportionate to any threat to the lives of local residents, security personnel or anyone else. To the extent that the government had a legitimate security interest in securing the sit-in site, it failed to carry out the dispersal in a way designed to minimize the risk to life, such as by ensuring safe exits. Lethal force should be used only when strictly unavoidable



Egypt's National Defense Council (NDC), chaired by Interim President Adly Mansour and consisting of leading civilian and security officials, meets in July 2013. On August 4, the NDC formally reviewed and approved the plan to disperse the Rab'a and al-Nahda sit-ins drafted by the Interior Ministry. According to security sources, the plan anticipated several thousand casualties. On August 15, the day after the dispersal, Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim told Al-Masry al-Youm that "the dispersal plan succeeded 100 percent."

to protect an imminent threat to life—a standard that was far from met in this case.

Egyptian and international mediation efforts to prevent a forcible dispersal by striking a political deal between Muslim Brotherhood leaders and the government took place throughout July and the beginning of August until Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawy announced their failure on August 7. The Interior Ministry, which had already drawn up a dispersal plan that had been approved by the National Defense Council and the cabinet and had received authorization to disperse from the Public Prosecutor based on citizen complaints that had been submitted, announced that it would proceed with dispersing the sit-ins. However, for weeks security officials promised that the dispersal would be gradual, starting with a cordon around the sit-in, warnings and a safe exit, in particular for women and children. None of the promised precautions, however, were taken.

The government ultimately opted to proceed with a violent forcible dispersal with full awareness that it would result in a very high death toll: one human rights defender told Human Rights Watch that, in a meeting with human rights organizations nine days before the dispersal, Interior Ministry officials revealed that the ministry's anticipated a death toll of up to 3,500. In the days before the dispersal, two prominent newspapers cited security sources as indicating that the Interior Ministry's dispersal plan anticipated several thousand casualties.

In a televised interview on August 31, 2013, Ibrahim confirmed that the Interior Ministry had estimated losses of "10 percent of the people," acknowledging that the sit-in involved "more than 20,000" people and that "you will find thousands lost from their side." Human Rights Watch used satellite photographs from one night of the sit-in, August 2, to estimate that there were approximately 85,000 protesters in the square that night; even assuming the actual attendance on August 14 was only 20,000, as Ibrahim postulated, a 10 percent casualty rate would still represent 2,000 fatalities.

In September, Prime Minister al-Beblawy told the Egyptian daily Al-Masry al-Youm that the death toll from the Rab'a and al-Nahda square dispersals on August 14 was "close to 1,000." He added, "We expected much more than what

actually happened on the ground. The final outcome was less than we expected." The Egyptian government apparently planned for, and anticipated, a violent dispersal that would result in widespread killings of protesters without any serious effort to implement the safeguards they promised, including warnings and safe exits for protesters.

On November 14, FMA head Dr. Hisham Abdelhamid held a press conference and announced that the final death-toll for Rab'a was 627, including 377 bodies autopsied at the official morgue, 167 bodies identified in Iman Mosque Rab'a Square and another 83 bodies that were taken to different hospitals around Cairo. The quasi-official National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) released a report on the Rab'a dispersal in March 2014, in which it cited the figure of 624 civilians killed.

These figures, though, ignore compelling evidence of additional uncounted bodies in morgues and hospitals across Cairo documented by Human Rights Watch researchers and Egyptian human rights lawyers on August 14 and in the days immediately following the Rab'a dispersal. Based on an extensive review of evidence, which compared death lists put out both by the official FMA and quasi-official NCHR and human rights lawyers and other survivors, Human Rights Watch documented 817 deaths in the Rab'a dispersal alone. Human Rights Watch also reviewed evidence of a possible 246 additional deaths, documented by survivors and civil society groups. This evidence, in addition to credible reports of additional bodies taken directly to hospitals and morgues without accurate record or known identity, and individuals still missing from Rab'a, it is likely that over 1,000 protesters were killed in Rab'a alone.

Other Mass Killings Incidents

The Rab'a and al-Nahda square dispersals were both preceded and followed by other mass killings of protesters. In July and August, as protesters organized marches across Cairo in response to the military's overthrow of the Morsy government, security forces repeatedly used excessive force to respond to demonstrations, indiscriminately and deliberately killing at least 281 protesters in

different incidents separate from the August 14 dispersals between July 5 and August 17, 2014.

In the first of these incidents, on July 5, soldiers fired live ammunition at protesters gathered outside the Republican Guard headquarters on Salah Salem Street in eastern Cairo, where protesters believed Morsy to be held. The soldiers killed at least five protesters, including one who was attempting to place a Morsy poster on a fence outside the headquarters.

Three days later, on July 8, army units opened fire on crowds of Morsy supporters participating in a peaceful sit-in outside the same Republican Guard headquarters, killing 61 protesters according to the FMA. Two officers on the scene were also killed. The attack began at dawn and continued for the next six hours. Soldiers and snipers posted on military building rooftops used live ammunition to fire at assembled protesters and those emerging from a nearby mosque after performing morning prayers. Some protesters threw stones and Molotov cocktails and a few used firearms, but witnesses said that the vast majority of protesters were unarmed. Based on its investigation, Human Rights Watch found that the majority of these killings were unlawful. In the aftermath, the military refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing on the part of its forces or the police, saying that protesters had planned to attack the Republican Guard headquarters. Interim President Adly Mansour said he would set up a judicial panel to investigate the incident, but he failed to do so before leaving office on June 8, 2014.

In another incident on July 27, hours after thousands of Egyptians took to the streets in an orchestrated demonstration at al-Sisi's behest to give the government a "mandate to fight terrorism," Egyptian police deployed to stop a march of hundreds of Brotherhood supporters moving out of the Rab'a sit-in on Nasr Road towards the October 6 Bridge. Over a period of at least six hours, police and plainclothes armed men acting in coordination with security forces shot and killed 95 protesters, according to the FMA. One policeman also died in the clashes. Human Rights Watch's investigation of this incident, which included being in the field hospital as many of the dead and wounded were brought in, concluded that security forces used intentional lethal force against largely peace-

ful protesters. Medical staff reported that the majority of the bullet injuries were to the head, neck, and chest, indicative of intent to kill. A doctor on the scene concluded, based on the nature of the wounds, that the shootings had to have been from close range. Later in the day, the interior minister insisted, “We never, as police, pointed any firearms at the chest of any demonstrator.”

Two days after the Rab’a and al-Nahda dispersals, on August 16, police at the Azbakiya police station in the Abbasiyya neighborhood of central Cairo opened fire on hundreds of protesters who had gathered after the Friday noon prayer as part of a “Day of Anger” called by Brotherhood supporters to protest the dispersal of the sit-ins and ouster of Morsy. In the course of the next six hours, at least 120 protesters were killed, according to the FMA. Prosecutors have also identified two policemen who were killed. A senior police officer at the station told Human Rights Watch that gunmen attacked the police station, triggering the government response. Although gunmen attacking the police station might have justified the use of lethal force, the number of protesters killed, statements by victims and witnesses, including indepen-

cluding medical personnel and journalists, told Human Rights Watch that a high number of protesters had suffered wounds in the head, neck, and upper body, raising the question of whether some police officers may have been shooting to kill.

Both the police and army took part in the attacks on demonstrators. Army units played the primary role in confronting demonstrators outside the Republican Guard headquarters on July 5 and 8, though police participated as well. Police dispersed the July 27 march outside the Manassa Memorial and the August 16 demonstration in Ramses Square. Police, including both Central Security Forces (CSF) and Special Forces (ESF), took the lead role in the Rab’a and al-Nahda dispersals, though the army played a critical role. Army forces secured the entrances, inhibiting protesters from entering and exiting, operated some of the bulldozers that cleared the way for police to advance, operated some of the helicopters, including Apaches, that flew over the square, and opened a military base adjacent to Rab’a Square to snipers. Police officers led the advance into Rab’a Square and appear to be responsible for most of the force used there.



Then-Deputy Prime Minister for Security Affairs Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in a speech at an army graduation ceremony broadcast live on state television on July 24, 2013 calls on Egyptians to take to the streets to “to give [him] a mandate and an order to confront potential violence and terrorism.” On July 26, tens of thousands of Egyptians gathered in orchestrated demonstrations in Tahrir Square and across Egypt to answer his call. Hours later, in the early morning of July 27, police opened fire on a march of pro-Morsy supporters near the Manassa Memorial in Cairo, killing at least 95 demonstrators. The next day, the Egyptian National Defense Council, on which al-Sisi served, met to begin planning the Rab’a and al-Nahda dispersals and on July 31 the cabinet, citing a popular mandate to “fight violence and terrorism,” approved the Interior Ministry’s dispersal plan. Al-Sisi was elected president in June 2014. © 2013 AFP

dent observers, and video footage show that the police intentionally fired on largely peaceful protesters. Human Rights Watch documented several instances of police killing clearly unarmed protesters. Witnesses who saw bodies and wounded in the hospitals and morgues, in-

International legal standards allow the intentional use of lethal force in policing situations in limited circumstances where strictly necessary to protect life. While security services may have been justified in using a degree of force to stop armed attacks by protesters or even to



disperse protests that constituted a danger to public security, there is no justification for the manner and scale of the violence that was used. Those planning the dispersal operations were under a strict duty to take all feasible measures to ensure the operations posed a minimal risk to life, which the organizers comprehensively failed to do.

Helicopters hover over protesters assembled in the Ramses Square area in the Abassiya neighborhood of Cairo on August 16, 2013 to protest the dispersal of the Rab’a and al-Nahda sit-ins two days prior to the ouster of Morsy. Dozens of witnesses told Human Rights Watch that they saw snipers fire on demonstrators from helicopters over both Raba’a Square on August 14 and Ramses Square on August 16. © 2013 Mosaab al-Shamy

Moreover, the systematic and widespread use by Egyptian security forces of unlawful lethal force, resulting in the deaths of well over 1,000 protesters, in a manner that was not only anticipated, but planned by Egyptian government leaders, likely constitutes crimes against humanity. The mass killings at Rab’a and al-Nahda squares fit a pattern of government security forces’ widespread and systematic killings of protesters seen throughout July and August 2013 following Morsy’s ouster. The prohibition of crimes against humanity is among the most fundamental in international criminal law and can be the basis for individual criminal liability in international fora, as well as in domestic courts in many countries under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

This report identifies the most senior security officials and key leaders in the chain of command who should be investigated and, where there is evidence of responsibility, held individually accountable for the planning and execution or failing to prevent the widespread and systematic killings of protesters during July-August 2013, including:

- Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim, who formulated the dispersal plan and oversaw its implementation and acknowledged that he “ordered the Special Forces to advance and purify” key buildings at the heart of Rab’a Square;
- Then-Defense Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who held a command role over the armed forces,

which opened fire on protesters on July 5 and July 8, oversaw security in the country as Deputy Prime Minister for Security Affairs, and acknowledged spending “very many long days to discuss all the details” of the Rab’a dispersal;

- Special Forces head and commander of the Rab’a operation Medhat Mershaw, who boasted that he told Minister Ibrahim from Rab’a Square on the morning of August 14 that “we will attack whatever it cost us.”

The report further identifies other figures, including the head of the General Intelligence Services, Mohamed Farid Tohamy, eight key Interior Ministry deputies, three senior army leaders, and several high-ranking civilian leaders, whose roles in the mass protester killings of July-August 2013 should be investigated further. If found complicit in the planning or execution of the mass killings of protesters or failing to prevent crimes committed by their subordinates that they knew or should have known about, they should also be held accountable.

The government has created a fact-finding committee to investigate the mass killings and the quasi-official National Council on Human Rights has released a report on its own investigations into the Rab’a dispersal finding wrongdoing. However, there has been no actual accounting for what happened or any credible judicial investigations or prosecutions, much less actual accountability. The police and government to date have refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing on the part of security services in their violent dispersal of the sit-ins or other attacks on protesters. In a news conference on August 14, Interior Minister Ibrahim said that his ministry successfully had carried out the dispersal of the Rab’a and al-Nahda sit-ins “without losses,” and referred to a non-existent “international standard death rate of 10 percent in the dispersal of non-peaceful sit-ins.” Days later, the Interior Ministry provided all officers that participated in the dispersal with a bonus for their efforts. Until February, authorities failed to even acknowledge that they had used live ammunition in the Rab’a and al-Nahda dispersals. Other members of the government have similarly praised security forces and failed to acknowledge any wrongdoing on the part of security forces.

The government also has refused to publicly disclose almost any information on the dispersals, even to the NCHR in connection with its investigation. Nasser Amin, a member of NCHR and lead author of its report on the Rab’a dispersal, said on the Egyptian channel ONTV that the Interior Ministry did not cooperate with its investigation, including failing to provide its dispersal plan, and suggested that it sought to hide the truth. Although video footage of helicopters and buildings overlooking Rab’a Square show security forces recording the dispersal, the Interior Ministry has only selectively released footage pointing to violence on the parts of some demonstrators.

The NCHR report on the Rab’a dispersal, released on March 16, has significant methodological weaknesses that seriously undermine its findings. In particular it relies heavily on testimony of local residents, largely antipathetic to the Brotherhood, and there is little use of accounts of participants in the sit-ins who were the primary witnesses and victims. Nonetheless, the NCHR report concluded that security forces used excessive force on August 14 and faulted security forces for insufficient warnings and failure to provide a safe exit for much of the day. It also called for the opening of a full judicial inquiry into the dispersal and for the provision of victim compensation.

Prosecutors to Human Rights Watch’s knowledge have not seriously investigated police or army officers for protester killings since June 30, 2013, but have extensively investigated protesters in relation to clashes with security forces. Prosecutors have initiated criminal proceedings against over 1,000 protesters and bystanders detained from the Rab’a and al-Nahda dispersals alone. Many face lengthy prison sentences.

One year after the dispersals, authorities have failed to hold accountable police and army officers and other officials responsible for the repeated use of excessive lethal force and indiscriminate and deliberate attacks on protesters. On March 19, former President Mansour requested the Justice Ministry to open a judicial investigation into the Rab’a and Nahda dispersals. The Ministry of Justice, however, announced that it would not be assigning a judge to investigate these events, since investigations fall under the prerogative of the public prosecutor, which in turn says that it is already investigating these



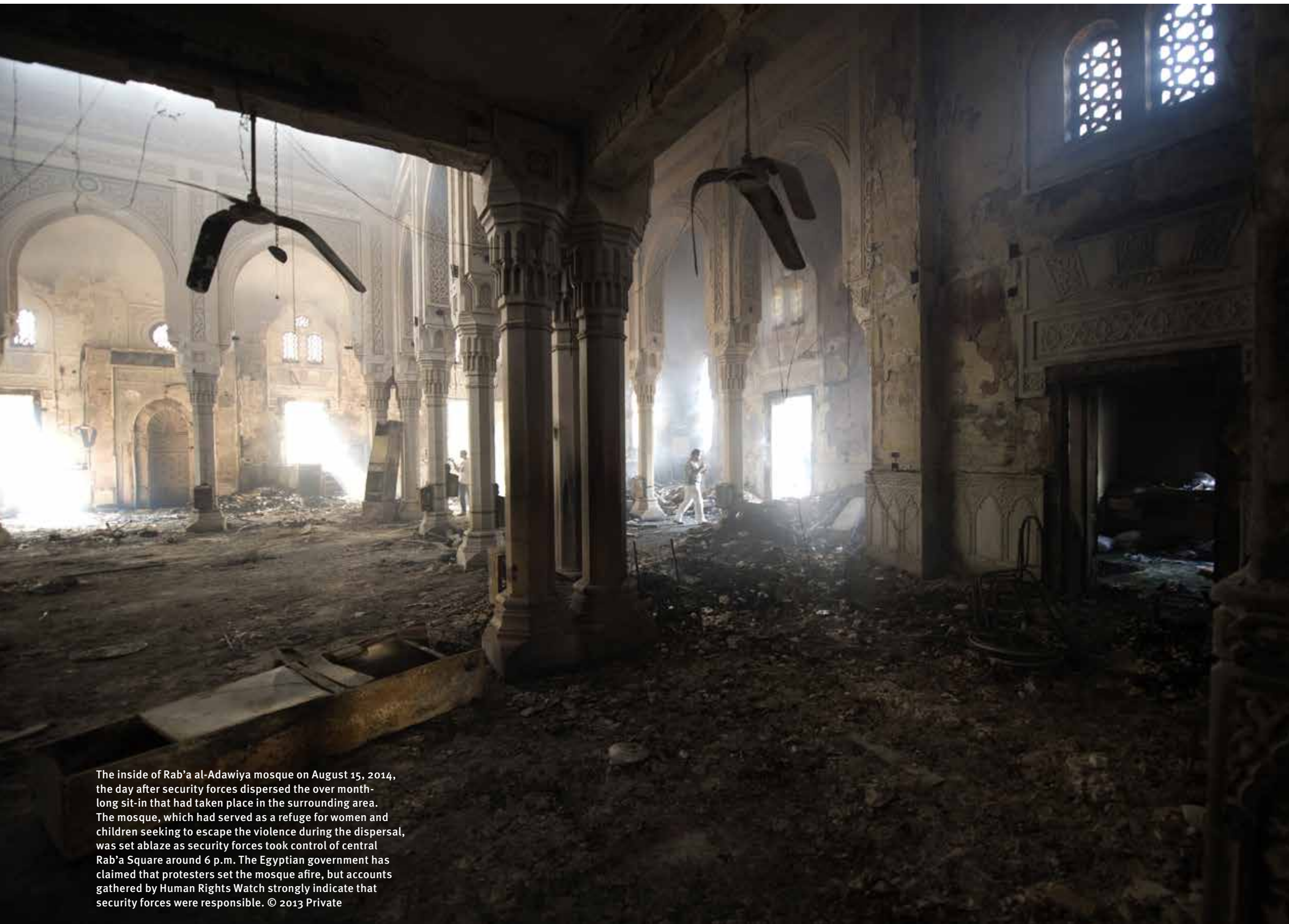
events. Almost one year later though, prosecutors have yet to bring charges against or refer to trial a single member of the security forces for the unlawful use of firearms against protesters since June 30, 2013.

Five months after promising to do, Mansour announced in December 2013 that he had established “a national independent fact-finding commission to gather information and evidence that accompanied the June 30, 2013 revolution and its repercussions.” The committee, though, has operated with little transparency and, by its mandate, will not make its findings public. The decree establishing the committee further failed to provide it with the authority to compel witnesses, including gov-

A demonstrator grieves in one of the makeshift field hospitals that held injured and deceased protesters during the dispersal of the Rab’a sit-in on August 14, 2013. © 2013 Mosaab al-Shamy

ernmental officials, to testify or to subpoena information, raising questions about the sort of information it has relied upon during its investigation.

Since the events of July and August 2013, Egyptian authorities have continued to brutally suppress dissent. While focused overwhelmingly on the country’s largest political opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, authorities have also targeted other opposition groups and individuals. Security forces have continued to use excessive lethal force against demonstrators, including killing



The inside of Rab'a al-Adawiya mosque on August 15, 2014, the day after security forces dispersed the over month-long sit-in that had taken place in the surrounding area. The mosque, which had served as a refuge for women and children seeking to escape the violence during the dispersal, was set ablaze as security forces took control of central Rab'a Square around 6 p.m. The Egyptian government has claimed that protesters set the mosque afire, but accounts gathered by Human Rights Watch strongly indicate that security forces were responsible. © 2013 Private

57 protesters on October 6, 2013 and 64 on January 25, 2014, according to the FMA. An assembly law passed in November 2013 authorizes the Interior Ministry to forcibly disperse protests that they have not been approved in advance and to arrest demonstrators on vague grounds such as “attempt[ing] to influence the course of justice” or “imped[ing] citizen’s interests.” Authorities have also arrested, by their figures, at least 22,000 people since July 3, many on charges relating to their exercise of basic rights or for membership in the Muslim Brotherhood, which the government declared a terrorist organization on December 25, 2013. Prosecutors routinely renew pretrial detention orders against those detained on the basis of little evidence that would warrant prosecution, effectively detaining them arbitrarily for months on end, lawyers have told Human Rights Watch. Many of the cases that have gone to trial have been riddled with serious due process violations, including mass trials that have failed to assess the individual guilt of each defendant, yet resulted in sentences of lengthy prison terms or even the death penalty for hundreds of defendants.

Human Rights Watch reiterates calls it has made throughout the last year for the Public Prosecutor to thoroughly, independently, and impartially investigate the mass killings of protesters since June 30, 2013 and prosecute those found to have committed violations. Government statements make clear that the August 14 dispersals and attacks on demonstrators before and after were ordered by the government. As such, investigations must look at those responsible in the chain of command, including Interior Minister Ibrahim and then-Defense Minister and now President al-Sisi, ensuring that all perpetrators of serious human rights abuses are brought to justice regardless of rank or political affiliation.

The new Egyptian government should also acknowledge the serious violations that it committed in July and August 2013, provide fair compensation to victims’ families, and undertake a serious process of security sector reform that results in a police force that acts in accordance with international standards on the use of force in future policing of demonstrations.

In light of the failure of Egyptian authorities until now to undertake investigations and continuing rampant impu-

nity for serious abuses, Human Rights Watch calls on the UN Human Rights Council member states to establish a commission of inquiry to investigate all human rights violations resulting from the mass killing of demonstrators since June 30, 2013. The inquiry should be mandated to establish the facts, identify those responsible with a view to ensuring that the perpetrators of violations are held accountable, as well as collect and conserve information related to abuses for future use by credible judicial institutions. Such a call follows a joint declaration made by 27 states during the March session of the Human Rights Council, which cited the need for “accountability” and “bring[ing] to justice those responsible” for the violence.

Human Rights Watch further calls for the investigation and prosecution of those implicated in these acts in national courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws.

The European Union and the United States have both publicly criticized the mass killings in Egypt. EU High Representative Catherine Ashton for example on August 21, 2013 called the dispersal operations “disproportionate” and the “number of people who have been killed” “alarming.” However the EU and other states have continued to provide support to Egypt. The United States suspended a portion of its military aid in October 2013 pending a finding required in aid legislation that Egypt was meeting particular benchmarks on rights and democratic development. But in April 2014, Washington announced its intention to release 10 Apache helicopters and \$650 million in military aid on the basis of US counter-terrorism and national security interests. A bulk of the aid has since been released. The EU similarly suspended the export of military equipment to Egypt in August 2013, but left in place flexibility that permits individual states to continue supplying arms and other equipment to the government.

In light of the ongoing abuses and severe political repression in Egypt and the government’s failure to investigate, much less prosecute, those implicated in the mass killings of protesters, Human Rights Watch calls on states to suspend military aid and cooperation with Egyptian law enforcement and military until the government adopts measures to end serious human rights violations.

President al-Sisi takes over an Egypt bloodied, divided, and rife with deep economic and political challenges. While it is tempting to turn the page and look past prior abuses, reckoning with the past lies at the heart of the national reconciliation process that Egypt needs to undertake in order to stabilize and move forward.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Egyptian Government

- Order security forces to end unlawful, excessive use of force and to act in accordance with international human rights law and standards on the use of force in policing demonstrations.
- Make public the findings and recommendations of the post-June 30 fact-finding commission, in addition to those of the 2011 and 2012 fact-finding commissions.

To the Public Prosecutor

- Thoroughly and impartially investigate the unlawful use of force by security forces for protester killings since June 30, 2013, and prosecute those, including in the chain of command, against whom there is evidence of criminal responsibility.
- Immediately release any people still detained without charge following demonstrations in July and August 2013, or immediately charge them with specific cognizable criminal offences followed within a reasonable timeframe by a fair trial.

To UN Member States

- Establish through the UN Human Rights Council an international commission of inquiry to investigate all human rights violations resulting from the mass killings of protesters since June 30, 2013. The inquiry should be mandated to establish the facts, identify those responsible with a view to ensuring that the perpetrators of violations are held accountable, as well as collect and conserve information related to abuses for future use by credible judicial institutions. Ensure that the mandate is sufficiently broad to cover past and future acts and other human rights abuses committed by Egyptian security forces, as well as violence by protesters.
- Suspend all sales and provision of security-related items and assistance to Egypt until the government adopts measures to end serious human rights violations, such as those related to suppression of largely peaceful demonstrations, and to holding rights violators accountable.
- Under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws, investigate and prosecute those implicated in serious crimes under international law committed in Egypt in July-August 2013.



In July and August 2013, tens of thousands of Egyptians, many supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, participated in demonstrations across Egypt to denounce the military's July 3 ouster of Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first elected civilian president.

In *All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt*, Human Rights Watch documents the manner in which Egyptian police and army forces methodically opened fire on crowds of unarmed protesters at six demonstrations in July and August 2013, killing at least 1,150 people. Human Rights Watch's year-long investigation into the killings included interviews with over 200 witnesses, visits to each of the protest sites, and review of video footage, physical evidence, and statements by public officials. The report concludes that the systematic and widespread killings likely amount to crimes against humanity.

In the single largest incident, Egyptian security forces forcefully dispersed the major pro-Morsi sit-in in Rab'a al-Adawiya Square in Cairo, where demonstrators, including women and children, had been camped out for over 45 days. Using armored personnel carriers, bulldozers, hundreds of ground troops, and snipers, security forces followed a violent dispersal plan that had been formulated by Egyptian authorities in full awareness that it would result in the deaths of thousands. Security forces attacked the protest encampment, including makeshift hospitals. They gave little to no effective warning and surrounded protesters, leaving no safe exit for those seeking to escape the violence, for nearly 12 hours. Security forces killed at least 817 and likely over 1,000 people, making it one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history.

One year later, the Egyptian government has failed to hold accountable even a single Egyptian police and army official. In light of this failure, the report calls for international accountability, prosecution of those implicated in serious crimes under international law, and full suspension of military aid and law enforcement support to Egypt.

(above) The front of Rab'a al-Adawiya mosque on August 15, 2014, the day after security forces dispersed the over month-long sit-in that had taken place in the surrounding area. The mosque, which had served as a refuge for women and children seeking to escape the violence during the dispersal, was set ablaze as security forces took control of central Rab'a Square around 6 p.m. The Egyptian government has claimed that protesters set the mosque afire, but accounts gathered by Human Rights Watch strongly indicate that security forces were responsible.

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(front cover) A volunteer tends to an injured demonstrator in front of a police armored personnel carrier (APC) in Rab'a Square in Cairo, Egypt on August 14, 2013. That day, Egyptian police and army forces opened fire on tens of thousands of demonstrators who had been staging an open-ended sit-in calling for the re-instatement of former president Mohamed Morsi, and violently dispersed the demonstration, killing at least 817 people.

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