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Egyptian woman describes jail conditions in letter

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/egyptian-woman-describes-jail-conditions-letter-150715165712815.html>

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Esraa el-Taweel is one of thousands of young people detained by authorities since the fall of former-President Morsi.

An Egyptian woman detained by authorities without charge since the start of June has provided a rare glimpse in to the lives of women detained in the country's prisons, in a letter she wrote.

The message, which was written on July 7 and made public on Tuesday evening, describes the moment Esraa el-Taweel was bungled in to a mini-van by unidentified men, and later taken to a holding facility operated by security forces for interrogations.

“I spent 15 days at the national security premises, listening to interrogations, hearing sounds of torture, and men crying loudly...I was the only lady there, fifteen days with my eyes were covered,” the 23-year-old photographer wrote.

After 16 days Taweel was taken to a court hearing, which she said lasted 18-hours. She further describes struggling to stand through the hearing because of a gunshot wound she had picked up during a protest in January 2014.

The injury she said left her with spinal damage, and difficulty maintaining posture.

Security forces then transferred Taweel to al-Qanater prison, a facility used both to imprison political opponents of the Egyptian government, and those accused of common criminal offences.

Authorities accused Taweel of being a member of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, and fabricating news.

‘Full of cockroaches’

Taweel writes that conditions at the prison are dirty, and that she feels intimidated by the other inmates.

“The prison is scary and horrible. A different world ; some (prisoners) are caught for using drugs, some for being prostitutes, some for pickpocketing, and others for stealing public funds. I have seen strange people and heard very strange stories.

“This cell is disgusting, full of cockroaches. Everything here is disgusting and life here is very difficult. I miss my home, my family, my friends, and my cat Woody.”

She describes some respite from the conditions during family visits, and when she was moved to a section of the prison inhabited by members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Taweel denied being a member of the group but said she preferred living with their members because they did not smoke.

Criticism of government

In the concluding section of the letter, Taweel who was detained along two male friends, expresses anger and despair at her situation.

“At the end of the tunnel, life gives us light, it lets us forget the pain we suffered greatly...Oh God, when will this nightmare end,” she said.

The arts student at Cairo university is one of dozens of people who have been ‘disappeared’ in recent months prompting criticism of the Egyptian government led by President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi.

The government-run National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) has said it has received 50 complaints over such cases.

Egyptian human rights organisations have documented at least 124 deaths in Egyptian prisons caused by negligence, ill-treatment, or murder, according to Human Rights Watch.