


In the Shadows





International Day of Light
April 16th, 2022

Belady: an Island for Humanity-- a Human Rights Organization supporting Egyptian Women & Children since 2017

Belady aims to dismantle institutionalized violence by documenting the Egyptian regime's violations against women and children and educating national and international society and decision makers about them. We also pressure and advocate the amendment of legislation that codifies violations while calling upon authorities to implement overlooked laws and treaties that would ensure respect for rights and freedoms. Belady provides legal and psychological support for Egyptian women and children who have been detained in political cases.

FOLLOW US


An island for humanity
<https://belady-ih.org/>

 @belady_gh
  @belady_gh
  @belady-an-island-for-humanity
  @belady_gh

Introduction

The International Day of Light celebrates the role light plays in sustainable development, which cannot be fulfilled unless all individuals and groups, including prisoners, have access to this right. Many prisoners spend their detention durations in unsanitary conditions in overcrowded cells inside Egyptian detention places, which makes access to light sometimes seem to be an impossible dream. Lighting in prisons and places of detention is not only essential to tell day from night or to perform daily activities, but also it is highly significant, in particular, for its role in preserving the physical and psychological health of prisoners and accessing many other fundamental rights, such as the right to education and food. Therefore, Belady took this opportunity to underline the importance of prisoners' access to their right to light and how this affects various aspects of their lives in detention places by collecting several testimonies from different Egyptian prisons.

First, is There Any Legislation Addressing this Concern ?

Article 14 of the Nelson Mandela Rules (The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners stipulates the following

In all places where prisoners are required to live or work

a) The windows shall be large enough to enable the prisoners to read or work by natural light and shall be so constructed that they can allow the entrance of fresh air whether or not there is artificial ventilation

b) Artificial light shall be provided sufficient for the prisoners to read or work without injury to eyesight!

Second, the Natural Lighting in Egyptian Prisons

Starting from the design of prisons, we note that the basic needs of prisoners were not taken into account. For instance, the prisoners of Wadi Al Natrun suffer from the lack of natural light, due to the absence of an "atrium allowing some sun rays to enter. Moreover, the cell windows overlook the ward's corridor, leading to poor ventilation and lighting. Wards (C) and (D) in Tora Reception Prison also do not allow sunlight due to the absence of windows, except for having an air vent on top of the cell's ceiling. As for the Appeal Prison, sunlight can barely enter the cells that prisoners fail to tell day from night. Likewise, prisoners of Tora Maximum Security Prison 2 are deprived of natural lighting. Prisoners suffer from the severe absence of natural lighting in the cells. The windows overlook the ward's interior corridor from all sides of the cell, which prevents sunlight from entering, adding to the fact that the ward has at least two underground floors.



¹The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Article 14

”
Wards (C) and (D) are a disaster. They never get sunlight. They are called the cemeteries because they don't allow sunlight, air, or anything else.
Testimony of an Ex-Prisoner in Tora Reception Prison
“

”
The Appeal Prison doesn't allow sunlight. You can't even tell day from night
Ex-Prisoner in the Appeal Prison
“

On the other hand, even when the infrastructure in some prisons or wards allows natural lighting, this does not necessarily mean that prisoners enjoy it, for several reasons. For example, in Al Qanater Women's Prison, most of the windows overlook walls or are deliberately blocked with beds not to allow sunlight or daylight to enter.

”
Unfortunately, the sunlight rarely gets in. In front of the windows, there was a bed, which completely blocked it.
An Ex-prisoner in Al Qanater Women's Prison
“

Third, Artificial Lighting in Egyptian Prisons

Faced with the severe lack of natural lighting or its total absence in prisons, prisoners resort to using artificial lighting on a regular basis, even in the middle of the day. But do the prisons provide that or do they leave the prisoners to their own fates?

For example, in Wadi Al Natrun Maximum Security Prison, neon lights of all kinds can be purchased, whether to light the entire cell or for individual use. However, in the prison, lamps are sold at exorbitant prices compared to the prices outside. According to an ex-prisoner, the standard cost of installing an ordinary lamp is 200 Egyptian pounds. The prisoners buy small lamps at their own expense in Tora Prison.

Belady also observed the request of prisoners of the Appeal Prison to double the power of lighting due to the complete lack of natural lighting. As for Al Hadra Prison, cases of inaction by the administration were recorded when it was necessary to replace the damaged lamps, in addition to charging their costs to prisoners at exorbitant prices. According to the testimony of an ex-prisoner in Tora Reception prison, the wires used in lamps are equipment of primitive.

manufacturing, pose a potential danger to the lives of prisoners, and often cause them electric shocks. As for Tora Maximum Security Prison 2, Belady recorded the denial of entry or possession of any lamps other than those provided by the prison, which leads to the prisoners' poor vision.

Prisoners are often compelled to use primitive alternative lighting methods in ways that breach safety standards in order to obtain some necessities.

On the other hand, complaints of ex-prisoners in Al Qanater Women's Prison about excessive strong artificial lighting 24 hours per day and their inability to control them are frequent. There is no power switch to control the lighting in some wards, and sometimes the power control is entrusted to the prison administration. This continuous intense lighting causes chronic headaches and difficulty sleeping for some prisoners


”
Actually, the problem is that it is very difficult for someone to sleep with excessive lighting over their head, especially when we are on the second or third floor of bed. It was difficult to sleep while the light was focused on us, and it also caused us severe headaches
An Ex-prisoner in Al Qanater Women's Prison
“

Fourth, the Lack of Lighting and its Impact on Mental Health

The lack of exposure to sunlight directly leads to the deterioration of prisoners' mental health, as sunlight and the blue light spectrum have a significant positive effect on the mood of people. Studies have shown that light increases the secretion of the hormones "Serotonin and Dopamine", which are responsible for relaxation and the antidepressant effect. Therefore, the lack of exposure to light makes the prisoners vulnerable to depression, stress, and the inability to control feelings and reactions

On the other hand, continuous exposure to strong artificial light leads to an imbalance in mental health, as it increases the secretion of Cortisol (the stress hormone), leading to chronic anxiety and excessive impulsivity².

”
I always felt tired and unable to take a break from the light that is always on.
An Ex-prisoner in Al Qanater Women's Prison
“

 **A PLEA**

Following this report on the mental health and physical safety of prisoners as a result of the lack of access to lighting, Belady organization appeals to the Egyptian authorities to expedite the adoption of laws related to the Prison Regulation Law and its bylaws in line with international law and set electricity preventive measures to preserve the health of prisoners. Belady also calls on the authorities to address prison design problems to allow natural light, establish unified standards for artificial lighting inside prisons, prevent trade in it, and expedite the release of political prisoners to reduce overcrowding in prisons.

²Lighting and Ventilation: Association for the Prevention of Torture