

Egypt: Claims and Counter-Claims against Muslim Brotherhood in Activist's Death

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On a TV show on Sunday a witness emerged claiming to have seen Mohamed Al-Guindi at Al-Gabal Al-Ahmar camp, the Central Security Forces (CSF) camp in Nasr City where activists say the young man was subjected to torture that led to his death.

"I went as a result of an invitation from a Muslim Brotherhood friend," Sherif Al-Beheiri told Dream Channel hours after being questioned by the prosecutor-general's office. "There were 12 others, and we went supposedly to see hired thugs detained by the riot police in the vicinity of Tahrir Square and record their confessions that they were paid to be violent. We were allowed to walk freely through the camp. I saw a man being tortured away from the rest of the detainees. They were being tortured as a group. I knew there had been some verbal altercation between Al-Guindi and a police officer. He had been singled out for torture as a kind of revenge. I gave a description of the officer to the prosecution. I also found out that the alleged hired thugs were peaceful protesters. I couldn't help any of them and so I left the camp. It was only when I saw Al-Guindi's funeral and photos on TV that I realised it was him I had seen and decided to make my testimony public."

Al-Guindi, a 23-year-old member of the Popular Current formed by former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi, was pronounced dead on 4 February, a week after going missing during protests in Tahrir Square. It took three days for his family to discover his whereabouts. Their last contact with Al-Guindi was reported to be at 11.30pm on 27 January. On 31 January they tracked him down to Al-Helal Al-Ahmar public hospital where they found him in a coma. The hospital administration claimed he had been admitted on 28 January following a traffic accident somewhere close to Tahrir.

The hospital's report stated Al-Guindi had sustained head injuries resulting in a brain haemorrhage. Reports that the body showed evidence of a wire around the neck, electric burns to the tongue, burns from an iron on the back and abdomen and signs of being hit with a sharp implement on the face, head, abdomen, back and legs, have been widely circulated.

Al-Guindi's friends always suspected he died as a result of torture. One friend says he went to Al-Helal Al-Ahmar Hospital on more than one occasion between 28 and 30 January only to be told no patient named Al-Guindi had been admitted.

"It was in Al-Gabal Al-Ahmar camp that Al-Guindi received the injuries the authorities now

want to pass off as the result of a traffic accident,” Eslam Khalifa, a lawyer involved in Al-Guindi’s case, told Al-Ahram Weekly.

In addition to the testimony of Al-Beheiri, one of Al-Guindi’s friends, Ehab Ghobashi, has told the prosecutors that he called Al-Guindi on 28 January at 2am and he was still fine. On Monday prosecutors demanded access to Al-Guindi’s mobile phone records for the four days in question, though it will take some time to get the results. “I think the decisive word on whether his death was due to a car accident or a result of torture will only emerge after the release of the final forensic report, which is about to be delivered soon,” says Khalifa.

The Interior Ministry denies holding any detainees in CSF camps. “We do not have any prisoners inside CSF camps and never did,” Hani Abdel-Latif, the head of the Ministry of Interior’s media office, told the Weekly. “We temporarily detain troublemakers in a Cairo Security Directorate camp in Nasr City until they can appear before prosecutors. Since 25 January 2013 there have been 590 such detainees. They cannot be held in police stations so they are locked up in the Nasr City camp.”

Khalifa says Al-Beheiri received a mobile call on Monday threatening him if he did not change his story. Al-Beheira’s credibility as a witness, however, has been questioned, not least because, though he told Dream TV he had never been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, 24 hours earlier, in another televised interview, he said he did once belong to the group.

On Sunday Al-Beheiri also accused the Muslim Brotherhood of working in coordination with the police as they tortured detained demonstrators. He further claimed that he now regrets voting for Mohamed Morsi in the presidential elections. “The Brotherhood will sue Al-Beheiri,” responded Yasser Mehrez, the group’s media spokesman, “for falsely claiming its members tortured young revolutionaries.” Mehrez also told Al-Ahram that Al-Beheiri had never had any connection with the group.

“This person, Sherif Al-Beheiri, doesn’t belong to the Muslim Brotherhood and never did,” claimed Mehrez. “A resident of Omraniya district, he was actually a member of the presidential campaign team of Ahmed Shafik.”

Last week the president’s office released a statement saying it had instructed the prosecutor-general to investigate Al-Guindi’s death.

Prosecution spokesman Mustafa Dwidar said on Sunday that “the case is still under investigation and no one should make accusations or prejudge until the investigation ends.” Dwidar added that investigators had searched CSF camps and found no evidence of detainees.

On Sunday Abdel-Fattah Othman, assistant to the interior minister, repeated the official version of Al-Guindi’s death to the Shura Council, insisting the opposition activist died as a result of injuries sustained during a car accident.

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