



29 April 2014 – UN Secretary-general Ban Ki-moon and High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay strongly condemn the shocking imposition of the [death penalty on 683 individuals](#) in Egypt announced yesterday after mass trials clearly breaching international human rights law.

“Verdicts that clearly appear not to meet basic fair trial standards, particularly those which impose the death penalty, are likely to undermine prospects for long-term stability,” Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said in a [statement](#). The Secretary-General is also conscious of the regional and security implications of such sentences, and stressed that stability in Egypt is essential for the overall stability of the entire North Africa and Middle East region.

“It is outrageous that for the second time in two months, the Sixth Chamber of the Criminal Court in Al-Minya has [imposed the death sentence](#) on huge groups of defendants after perfunctory trials,” says Navi Pillay. “In defiance of worldwide pleas for Egypt to respect its human rights obligations after 529 people were sentenced to death in March by the same court, hundreds now face a similar fate at the hands of a judicial system where international fair trial guarantees appear to be increasingly trampled upon.”

“It is high time that Egypt takes its human rights commitments seriously,” Pillay added, noting in particular that Egypt has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

According to information received, the 683 defendants were charged with killing a policeman and breaking into the Edwa police station in Al-Minya on 14 August 2013, among other charges. As in the previous cases, the exact charges against each defendant are not clear, given that they were not individually read out in court.

“The presumption of innocence is fundamental to the protection of human rights in a criminal trial,” Pillay said. “It imposes on the prosecution the burden of proving the charge against each accused and it guarantees that no guilt can be presumed until the charge against him or her has been proved beyond reasonable doubt.”

“Instead of imposing death sentences wholesale, courts must ensure that accused individuals enjoy fair trials, including the benefit of doubt,” Pillay stressed.

Of the 529 people who were sentenced to death by the Sixth Chamber of the Criminal Court in Al-Minya on 24 March for killing a policeman and on various other charges, 37 had their sentences upheld by the court yesterday, while others reportedly received reduced sentences of 25 years, in itself excessive, and were fined EGP 20,000.

“The death penalty can only be applied for the most serious crimes and after the most stringent trial safeguards,” the High Commissioner said. “This has clearly not been the case in these two trials before the Al-Minya criminal court. A mass trial of hundreds of people, rife with procedural irregularities is simply not good enough for imposition of the death penalty. It is also a totally inadequate basis for sentencing 492 individuals to life in prison.