

A VIVID EXPERIENCE: ABOUT PRISON

"A PRISON GUIDE: FORMER OPINION
PRISONERS TESTIMONIES AND ADVICE"



A Vivid Experience: About Prison “A Prison Guide: Former Opinion Prisoners Testimonies and Advice”

About Guide and Testimonies

These are testimonies, advice, from former prisoners of conscience, about imprisonment and prisoners, and how to bypass the potential ordeal of imprisonment, for everyone who has a different opinion in Egypt. Prisoners during Mubarak's rule, prisoners of conscience for the current rule, men and women, young and old, official and secret prisons, police stations and prisons.

We transfer it without interference, except to correct the spelling and language, without order, we transfer it as it is. May it help you.

Testimonies and Advice

"My name is Nael, I spent one year in pre-trial detention in an opinion case. I was not the first nor the last (though I hope to be the last).

I advise anybody who is jailed or imprisoned in any conscience case not to think of other people who are out the walls of the prison. Surely they are in better status than you. The most thing that bothers them is that you are unjustifiably in there.

Think of using your time, for example: read, learn some skills, -
memories some verses from Quran or play sports.

Try, as much as you can, not to have links with your jailers, make it -
official. (by book).

Your real support in the prison is your cell and your comrades. You -
are nothing without them.

Always remember that no matter how long injustice lasts, finally -
justice wins, you will be released don't worry. It is just a matter of time.

Don't think about your losses during or after prison, you won your -
freedom after all, it is precious "

#Freedomforthebraveones

Nael Hassan
Case no.3020 Al Raml 1 Administrative
Date of imprisonment from 20th April 2017 to 26th April 2018
One year and six days
The prison: two months detained in Al Raml Police Station, ten months
jailed in Borg Al Arab Prison, Alexandria

"From the first moment I was arrested and taken to one of the National Security headquarters, handcuffed and eyes covered, I decided to deal intelligently and not forcefully, and deal with humanity and not arrogance, at the end of the day we are dealing with humans, some of whom can be domesticated despite their cruelty, and this is what I succeeded in.

When I moved to the Tora Mazraa ward, moving after several days of revenue from the Tora investigation prison, I was surprised to be in a ward with eighty criminal prisoners, and here it was necessary to deal with them as colleagues, friends and perhaps brothers, which made it easier for me to face problems of life in prison, starting with food and cleaning clothes until resolving disputes between them.

The most important concept that I think must be adhered to is that prison is not an arena for political strife, which saves the prisoner of conscience a lot of the intransigence of prison management, and guarantees him a measure of protection, sympathy and respect among his jailers, who deal with him as an intellectual, an opinion holder who has dignity, and at the same time does not cause them any troubles, and does not cause any problems, to the extent that they may resort to him to solve some of the problems of other prisoners, and this is exactly what happened to me.

The political prisoner must adapt to all the circumstances surrounding him, not complain too much, and to consider bearing them part of the price he pays in satisfactory content with his political, national and humanitarian struggle.

The basic idea that must control the prisoner is that this is a temporary period, that he will leave prison one day, and that every day that passes by him is the last day, and that tomorrow morning is his last day in prison. Since the first day, I have never occupied my mind with any personal needs, such as the availability of a razor, nail clippers, or newspapers, all of which are forbidden, but they were available if not from the prisoners, it will be from the warders.

Adaptation is the magic word that allows time, days, weeks, and months to pass without any feeling of frustration.

Treat yourself as if you will spend the rest of your life in this place, and expect to be out tomorrow.

Hassan Hussein

Case no. 482, year 2018

from the 3rd of March 2019 to the 9th of September 2018

Farm Ward Prison, Tora

"A proverb says: (prisoner is much worse than a crazy prison – if you put a prisoner in cesspool he will get out with a cigarette and lighter"

That is to say; you should help yourself with any means provided, cause you never know for how long you gonna stay at prison. Keep your mouth preserved while dealing with others, you should respect all, be nice to all, even criminals.

At first it hurts, depending on the prison you are transferred to. In the prison, there is some event called "the entrance", it is nothing but beating, don't worry, they are just examining your reaction and to what extent you are dangerous; are you going to call names, fight back or stay silent and live like a paste! Afterwards they are going to shave your hair, it is obligatory, no one is an exception.

You're gonna pass through something called "revenue", in there you will find prisoners who are agents to the security, every word you will utter is gonna be rendered to the administration. You will be under this test for ten or fifteen days.

You're gonna be placed according to your tongue and dealings with those people, they will judge you either by being extremely dangerous or not, in accordance you will be placed. You will receive three blankets, three loafs of bread, some beans and 50 grams of meat and some food. Food is not healthy, but you gonna get used to it, you also have the right to eat one egg and a quarter, it is divided among you and your friends. If you choose to go into hunger strike you should hand your food to the detective, when you hand him three loafs of bread he understands that you are in a hunger strike; he leads you to the disciplinary cell in order not to eat really, so, don't you ever declare a hunger strike unless there is a real danger.

Hossam Al Arabi

A year in prison, four months forcibly disappearance after release

Total detention period from January 2017 to April 2018
Dar Al Salam prisoners

Comrades and dears

There are unforgettable nights, no matter how hard we try, you know it for sure. One of those was the night at which I left the prison highly guarded 2 after spending one year during which they never stopped to tell me that I will never see the light again. As usual, I did not sleep that night, but it is unforgettable for the moment at which they called my name among the names that are included in the pardon. Each one of us wished to be the survivor, as for me, I was told, minutes before it, that I will be released. I was preoccupied by those whom I am going to leave here. At this night, everybody wept; those who are pardoned and those who are not. A comrade who is criminal-political told me: don't forget us. I think he is the reason. For the first time I write to you not about you. I always felt sorry, but I remember that I used to receive any word inside prison each word gave me a reason to go on and resist.

Once I wrote to you secretly before spending all this time in prison:
your face is mingled with stubbornness and pain

you are a window of light amidst of darkness who make miracles
the last breath of chanting of those whom their chants are interdicted

how toiled you are

how stiff you are

how strong you are

I used to wonder of your ability to resist beyond all these walls, sieged by all these armed men who consider you fouls. Now I know that it is not a choice, it is the only choice that we have; to resist.

I know that each has his way, each of you found his tools of resistance.

I write to you saying: you are our primary cause, we don't have the strength but we will not trespass a chance or a probability.

We are dears beside dears, comrades beside comrades, folks beside folks. Life will never be "normal" unless you are free with your beloved ones. We are all, as you, don't dream but for "normal" life, only normal life.
Keep resisting.

Ahmed Said
Prison of May 15 since the end of year 201

Highly Guarded prison in Tora 2016
Testimonies from Exile

Through my experience in prison for reasons related to freedom of opinion, if I may give an advice to those who lie behind walls during one of the worst periods that have passed in Egypt's history, and given the prison system as well as the way the authority operates according to the law, the most important thing that can be directed if it is permissible

- 1- Attempting to deal very calmly, whether with prison members or colleagues
- 2- Colleagues in custody are your support. Always make sure to deal well with them and to tie bonds of love and friendship
- 3- Do not try to think too much except for that which gives you joy, even if it is artificial
- 4- There is no need to enter into an argument with those imprisoned with you, especially in complicated cases
- 5- Be generous with colleagues in the event of visits and what may come to you from outside
- 6- If you had an opportunity to acquire skills, any skills from a fellow imprisoned with you, do not hesitate
- 7- Legally, detention renewals have no control, and therefore your lawyer are not to be blamed if the detention renewal is repeated
- 8- Never interfere with the privacy of those around you and do not try to find out about them what is outside of prison
- 9- Do not talk about details with prison colleagues who meet by chance until before you gain confidence, and it does not come until after experiences
- 10- Be a partner to your colleagues if a public situation occurs, taking into account the privacy of the moment and place, the absence of law and perhaps accountability

Ahmed Qenawi, a lawyer
Prisons: Abu Zaabal and Sohag 1989

"I was arrested twice, in 2016 and 2020. At the first time I was the only defendant, the second, I was a defendant with other four ones. I don't need to

describe my feelings when I first see them. Circumstances of the two times are nearly the same; knocking the door at two or four o'clock in the morning, storming into the house, searching, taking away whatsoever: computers, mobiles, laptops, money, jeweleries, whether connected to the case or not. Afterwards, it happened to me and some others, and I was lucky to have things going legally, arrest then investigations in the National Security headquarter, then appearing before prosecution, then renewal of detention, then referring to court, and finally acquittal in 2016, and condemnation and a three months sentence at the second time in March 2020. At the two times I was detained for three months and some few days. I met people who were forcefully disappeared, some for months, others for 3 years. I was unfortunate at the two times as I was detained in a police station not a general prison, there is a big difference between the two cases when it comes to rights and livelihood.

At the police station, you are confined with no rights. Me and the others were totally isolated from the external world; no newspapers, no information about anything not even about Corona virus. It was interdicted to know any numbers, visits are forbidden, I am talking about the second one, it was bad because of the Covid 19 pandemic. The first was slightly better concerning visits and newspapers, though it was smuggled not officially allowed. Those who are presumably candidates for arrest should organize their homes all the time, you have to find an unreachable place for your private and personal papers. In their search, though they are wild yet they are stupid, it is easy to hide your private things from them. Don't ever leave phones reachable, I had three phones with no SIM cards and I was not using them, they simply took them.

Try not to put at home something that might be a pretext, though, I have around 5800 books at home, some of them could be considered an exhibit for them, yet, it is better if you keep awake till two or three o'clock in the morning. I do this now, but in prison you could not read but Quran, it is the only allowed book.

If you are in a general prison, there is a chance to read in the bibliotheque of the prison though. These my summed up impressions about prison without going into details.

Mohamed Ibrahim Ahmed Al Nagdi

Talkha police station 2016 (since march till the end of may 2016)

Mansoura police station 1 2020 (from March to July 2020)

"It is difficult to say that there are fixed steps or a specific reaction that works for all people when dealing with the prison experience, or even the early days of it. Nevertheless, it is useful to get to know each other's experiences, as they may be helpful when the experience seems compulsory. But I think that the first step is a mixture between what you can train in before the experiment on your regular days, and a sudden reaction to an unexpected experience "if we can call it an experience" that depends on your ability to remain calm, giving your mind the opportunity to absorb the new situation, and dealing well with the absence of information and trying to take advantage of the little available, and of course the complete conviction that this situation is temporary, even if it lasts for the end of life, and that confronting tyrannical regimes is not impossible, but it is not easy."

Yussef Shaaban
one year and three months
2015-2016
Borg Al Arab prison, Alexandria

"It is said that the deceased feels that his death is approaching before it comes, so does the political prisoner always feels that he is leaving freedom as a price for his positions and principles, as if he is repaying a debt he did not borrow at a date he did not specify. The grant comes from the heart of misfortune: Certainly, the prison experience is a very bitter and cruel experience, perhaps the most severe punishment in existence, as it is the invention of the demons of the underworld and not the invention of a person of flesh and blood, but the biggest slap a prisoner may give to his jailers is to travel outside these walls and think about everything outside without trying to exhaust himself with bearing the burden of those who are outside, because there is no trick in the way. Traveling through imagination, planning and thinking beyond the prison and the future which is inevitably coming despite of every tyrant.

Hope is an exit visa:

It is not a slogan, as hope is the first step out of this ordeal, and indeed it is a visa to leave the underworld for life again, and the most important thing is for the prisoner to keep every iota of his mind and body and to preserve

them always so that he can endure the cruelty and bitterness of the experience.

Above all, the person must be aware from the beginning of what is coming to him since the investigation with him in the prosecution, this is the most important step, so do not strive and donate answers that are not appropriate or volunteer to give details that have no value except for the person involved in problems he is not in need of, the answer has to be sufficient as much as the question and does not motivate the prosecution, everyone knows how they take their decisions, but provoking them brings more problems.

- The most beautiful thing that a person can occupy his time with reading as much as possible and utilizing every paper or word. Even though the prison administration forbids us books and newspapers, we were trying all the time in various ways to smuggle any newspaper or book and occupy our time with them.

- The other thing is to try to record the experience, as this may be a project for writing later, and it is not a requirement that the transcription be in a written form, so the recording in memory suffices, as other people may benefit from this blogging. The experience of every prisoner of conscience remains an important and inspiring experience of how to rebuild a person through adversity, and how an individual can transform prison into energy and love, not only this, but also thinking about his ambitions and goals in life later and to succeed in his future after leaving a success that dazzles everyone and that the most important thinking is always to get out of the wall of despair and frustration.

We still dream of the return of our comrades so that they embrace their loved ones, and we will stick to this dream until the last day of our life and we will strive to achieve dignity, social justice, spread the culture of dialogue and accept difference, despite all the circumstances and constraints, for this is how they are the children of January revolution.

I was arrested twice, the first time; I was arrested on December 30, 2015, one day before New Year's Eve. I took a rotation from Jaber Ibn Hayyan to the Dokki Department, then four days of enforced disappearance in the National Security Agency in October. Finally, I was transferred to Giza Central Prison by the 10.5 kilo in which I spent three months ago till the end of March. I went released and spent nearly a month of freedom, the case of Tiran and Sanafir took place, so I was arrested again in the case of storming of the Journalists Syndicate on May 1, 2016 on Labor Day, and I was transferred from the prosecution to Tora Farm prison and spent 155 days

there, all of them in the disciplinary cell. Almost 40 of them are solitary days

Mahmoud Al Saqqa
Al Giza central prison at 10.5 kilo 201
Tora Farm prison 2016

"The most difficult thing that a prisoner experiences in contrast to all the direct grievances that he faces inside his prison, whether he is isolated alone or even physically tortured, are his feelings and fears for his family, especially if he is the one who supports the family. Positive news about his family will ease much of his oppression"

Abdul Monem Mahmoud
A Journalist and a former prisoner during Mubarak term
Tora Farm Prison 2003 and 2006
Al Mahkoum prison 2007

"At first it was the central security camp at Al Gabal Al Ahmar, I spent 8 days there then I was transferred to Abdin police station after appearing before the prosecution, I stayed there for 32 days.

Then I was transferred to Al Qanater and spent there 17 days.

In each detention place, there was a probability that the duration may last more, but if you do not submit, react or adapt easily this will lead them to get rid of you, I think.

I heard a lot about night visitors, those who climb stairs in the darkness and knock the doors hard to startle all those who are at home. I was lucky to live alone, I did this because I expected it.

No prosecution warrant, naturally, but at least you should ask for it –
just to force the officer who is arresting you to show you his ID.

Keep photos and private files on another phone or on memory card –
separated from your mobile, as the first thing they ask about is your phone, it is better to keep an ordinary phone with buttons to hand it to them. If you have a laptop or an Ipad just keep it hidden.

If you were a woman, insist on getting them outside in order to get –
dressed (they already ask you to get dressed, it is impossible that they

would say that they arrested you from the street in your pyjamas or a night gown) (actually, after appearing before the prosecution I did regret that I changed my clothes and did not go with my pyjamas in order to prove that I was arrested from home not from the street as they wrote in their report).

Send a short message to one of your close friends to note him/her that you are arrested if the mobile is available —

During the enforced disappearance do not cope with what they offer you. I was in the central security camp in Al Gabal Al Ahmar, I did not eat or drink, it was not a strike, but I did not have the appetite, moreover, food was different and filthy. They thought that I am in hunger strike, so they used to send me the recruits to talk to me from behind the door, offering me liver and sausage sandwiches, they claimed that they bought to me these sandwiches without the knowledge of the officer. It was a trap, if you eat these sandwiches then you are submitted, you will cope, this means that the enforced disappearance duration will be longer. You should resent the recruits, refuse the food he is offering you, do not react with his amusing stories, this will make you difficult to be handled and there is a probability that the period of enforced disappearance will be short as what happened with me. —

During the investigation with state security officer or prosecutor of state security, try to be brief, try to talk in the interest of the country and the people rather than attacking the regime or defending persons or ideas. Talk about your hobbies, like books you like to read, best writers best movies, breeding pets, drawing – such subjects confuse them, it makes them feel your humanity and see their crimes toward you. Don't be afraid and hold together, without indifference or arrogance. —

The most important lesson I learned that the regime mainly arrests you to draw you from your healthy life and to tame you to cope with corruption. —

In police stations you should bribe the police secretary in order to see your relatives or to achieve some staff they asked you to achieve. —

Sometimes you are submitted to a criminal detained with you in order to make a phone call to your folks or friends, he has a mobile phone and all those who are in the police station know it starting from the magistrate ending with the recruit, they know it and take tribute in order to keep it.

At prisons, it is the same, you submit to corrupted laws which you –
cope with and practice. Laws that draw you from your real world and
put you in the world of prison, if you adapt and submit you will stay
longer and you will be a number among some numbers, but if you
refuse to cope or to integrate and isolate yourself and insist that your
place is outside you will be a burden and an influential number that
they would like to get rid of, perhaps through release, and perhaps
through punishment, but the most important thing is that you should
not be forgettable.

The lawyers who are in solitary with you have an important role. The –
moment you see the lawyer after a long disappearance in which you
were cut off your beloved ones is peerless.

Naglaa Abdul Gawad

A PHD researcher in Modern and Contemporary African History
Prison: Central Security Camp in Al Gabal Al Ahmar, Abdin
police station and Al Qanater prison

I was arrested for loving Egypt, my charge was that I am a journalist who
defended prisoners and stood for justice. I was arrested and underwent
enforced disappearance for ten days in an unknown place, it was unknown
for me because simply I saw nothing.

I asked them where am I? Who are you? Does my family know where am I?
What I did? I want my lawyer, why do you fold my eyes? Many questions I
had, questions that are asked by every prisoner from the first moment of
arrest until s/he appears before the prosecution.

I went in a hunger strike from the very first day and for five days. It had a
negative impact on my health that I used to faint during the investigation. I
underwent a tremendous moral pressure; the sound of the key of the door of
my cell frightened me, I never knew who was coming and what he is going
to do to me? I stayed in a place which I never knew whether I am going to
leave or not.

You feel like a dead who is giving an account in the doomsday, nobody
could be with you. Their voices frighten you, the cell frightens you, you are
watched with cameras even when you are asleep.

Ten days passed on which I never knew my fate. I was transferred by a central security truck accompanied by special forces from the National Security headquarter to the prosecution and the journey of renewing detention started;

four days for the first session, and 15 days for the second.

I will never forget this day, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. I was sitting in a room which looks like a grave. There was a window of length that is equal to a palm, a pail and a number of women who are supposed to be transferred to prison. An inhuman situation, very humiliating, with our hands cuffed. The transferring truck is a sort of torment and slow death.

I collapsed. I was transferred to the police station with drug dealers, prostitutes, crooks and thieves. I appealed in the 14th day and I was released with a bail of 5 thousands L.E.

I was released but I hated the whole world, I hated people because of oppression and suppression I underwent. The impact usually appears after the release. I was desperate. I have a PHD and I will never be able to work because I have political case. I am striving and trying to go on.

When I went out, I saw solidarity campaigns launched for me, I started to feel that my sacrifice was not in vain, I gained the love of thousands. Arrest is not the end of the world, it is a harsh experience, I know, but it makes you stronger, it assures you that you are on the right path.

Darkness will end with light, a pen frightens them, a word shakes them, our agony is the tax of our love for Egypt.

Stop enforced disappearance, stop terrorizing opposition.

Yasmine Said

Journalist

Enforced disappearance then prison; July 2020

I was kidnapped and transferred to state security headquarter in Maasara. My eyes were closed with a cloth. They took me upstairs and escorted me to a room in which an officer interrogated me: do you pray? Why do you defend people who are accused with terrorism? What do you have to do with lawyers arrested in terrorism cases? Who are you? Who are your folks? Why do you write on facebook? Why are you preoccupied with the lawyers elections?"

Then I was transferred to the prosecution as I appeared to be investigated.

The prosecution decided to detain me. I was transferred to Tora Investigation.

A detective escorted me to a cell called “revenue” seems like a stable, with rectangle shape, of width 28 mq, and a toilet of length 1mx1m, a ground black toilet, and a faucet close to the ground, no door, no curtain. Walls were full of holes, the ground was gray. There were 4 windows with iron bars in two walls, each wall has two windows, and an electric ventilator on one of the windows. Sun or air do not come of these windows. The ceiling had three fans and a lamp that negatively affects the sight. The door was made of iron with a small whole in the upper part. Inside the cell there were 17 defendants their ages ranged between 18 to 40. I was the eldest. Among the detainees I found 3 lawyers and a number of Ultras Ahlawi. I grasped here that I have to be strong, I should never show my fear, they will never see my tears.

- I discovered that cigarettes resolve all problems when a colleague gave the sergeant a box of LM cigarettes so he allowed him to sport away from the cell secretly. I used to cry, but no one sees me. Put the blanket on your head and cry, go the toilet and cry... as much as you can. It will pass, and you will be released, we are all going to be released.

The radio and newspapers occupied me and I kept all what I witnessed on the back of my head. Not to mention my friends support as they sent me books and translated and local novels. I read a lot of novels, I never read for 20 years. Books were my friend.

An advice: consider yourself in Abdul Monem Riadh quarter during the revolution and imagine that you see the Nile river.

An extract from a long testimony of lawyer:
Mohamed Bahnasi
Tora Investigation Prison
From March 2020 to September 2020