**Egyptians beaten while protesting police brutality**

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CAIRO — Egyptian security forces hit protesters and knocked some to the ground before rounding dozens up at a demonstration Sunday against a police beating that killed a young man a week ago.

The protesters were venting Egyptian anger over the death of 28-year-old Khaled Said in the port city of Alexandria on June 6. Relatives, at least one witness and human rights groups say police beat him to death and pictures of his bloody, disfigured face have been circulating on the Internet. The Egyptian government claims he choked to death on a joint as police were trying to arrest him.

Human rights groups say police torture – including sexual abuse – is routine in Egypt though the government denies it is systematic. Reformers say a three-decade-old emergency law they describe as a central tool of repression by President Hosni Mubarak's regime is to blame. Cases of police brutality rarely result in punishment.

A couple hundred protesters gathered near the Ministry of Justice in the capital Cairo Sunday afternoon, some chanting "Down with Hosni Mubarak" and others holding up signs calling for an end to military rule and the prosecution of the interior minister for Said's death.

Security forces, some of them in plainclothes, beat protesters and knocked some to the ground. They put them in headlocks and handcuffed them before dragging them off to waiting trucks for arrest.

"Security officials used extreme forms of brutality on the protesters as they were arresting them," said Ahmed Maher, one of the protest organizers, who estimated 80 people had been detained.

Egyptian authorities repeatedly ordered journalists to leave the area and prevented television cameras from filming.

At one point, the son of prominent opposition leader Ayman Nour was grabbed by plainclothes police and carted off, before the former presidential candidate was able to wrestle him back into the crowd.

Demonstrators held up side-by-side photos of Said, one showing him alive and the other a grisly image after his beating.

Earlier Sunday, an interview was posted on the web with the owner of an Internet cafe who told a journalist from Nour's Ghad newspaper that he saw two policemen beat Said to death after dragging him out of his cafe in the seaside city of Alexandria.

"We thought they would just interrogate him or ask him questions. But they took him as he struggled with his hands behind his back and banged his head against the marble table inside here," the cafe owner Hassan Mosbah said.

The Interior Ministry has denied the allegations, claiming Saturday that Said was a known drug user wanted by authorities who died after choking on a joint he swallowed when police sought to arrest him.

Activists say his death is an example of rampant abuses made possible by the emergency law.

A fact-finding mission by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, confirmed the cafe owner's account.

"They dragged him to the adjacent building and banged his head against an iron door, the steps of the staircase and walls of the building," the Cairo-based organization said in a statement Sunday.

"Two doctors happened to be there and tried in vain to revive him but (the police) continued beating him," the statement said.

The official police statement, however, said the cause of death was suffocation from "a cigarette containing drugs" lodged in Said's trachea. It also said he was wanted for convictions in absentia for theft and weapons possession, in addition to evading compulsory military service.

"The allegations reported by some circles have intentionally ignored all the facts in order to show that the human rights situation in the country has been violated," said the police statement.

Amnesty International and other rights groups on Friday demanded an independent investigation.

The "shocking pictures ... are a rare, firsthand glimpse of the routine use of brutal force by the Egyptian security forces, who expect to operate in a climate of impunity, with no questions asked," Amnesty said.

The victim's brother, Ahmed Said, claimed the beating was in revenge for his possession of a video showing the policemen dividing the spoils of a drug bust among themselves and so they confronted him at the cafe. He said he saw his brother's body a day after his death. His jaw was twisted, his rib cage mangled and his skull cracked, he said. Similar images were posted on bloggers' websites and he confirmed their authenticity.