

Testimony of Azza Soliman - Lawyer, Founder and Head of Board of Trustees at the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA)

- Yesterday I was having lunch at Riche Cafe with my family and friends around 3:30 p.m., and I heard the sound of a march, so I stepped outside to take a look and I found Mr. Helmy Shaarawy, Mr. Talaat Fahmy, Mr. Ilhamy ElMerghany and others from the Popular Socialist Alliance Party. I said hello to some of them and we exchanged a conversation and laughed. They were around 25 - 30 people and they had flowers with them. They then moved to the opposite pavement facing me at Talaat Harb Square, and I went to take some pictures.

- The police then played a siren and started approaching those in the march, where some of them (the police) were wearing masks and had long black rifles with them. Nadeem my son came to me and told me: "Please come with me, they will start attacking them, I witnessed this situation many times before". I told him: "Of course they won't do that, and if they fire tear gas, I am used to it..", and I hadn't finished my sentence when they started shooting bullets and tear gas, and people ran and the police were behind us on the other pavement in front of Riche Cafe, where I saw a person drop on the ground, and I didn't know if it was a man or a woman, until I moved to the corridor right by the cafe and I knew that person was a woman, and I saw a small amount of blood, while I wasn't able to see her face, and the person with her was screaming: "Ambulance!", and one of the masked officers was approaching them with his weapon.

- Talaat was in our direction but a police officer took him from his hand to Talaat Harb Square. Friends of the injured woman took her to the ambulance and I didn't know any details. Of course the police were spread like locusts in Talaat Harb st., and were chasing people, and I saw them arresting 2 young men I didn't know.

- I started posting about what was happening, and a number of friends called me to check on me, and I asked them to update me about the situation of the woman who was injured. On my way home I called a friend of mine to check on Talaat Fahmy. She called me back and told me that the woman had died and Talaat got arrested with the others in Kasr ElNile Police Station.

- I left my house again and I couldn't believe that the woman had died.. She died in the span of a few minutes. I went to Zeinhom Morgue and the scene was utterly horrific. Most of her friends, whom I know, are young activists, and the screaming and crying increased, and I found out that the martyr had a 4 or 5-year old son.

- Ahmed Ragheb, the lawyer, asked me if I wanted to go forward with my testimony, and I told him that I am here for that specific purpose. We all went with lawyers and witnesses from the Popular Socialist Alliance Party to Abdeen Police Station.

- After an hour we met with the Head of the Prosecution and he took from us our I.Ds and my Legal Practice I.D. (as I am a Lawyer) to be registered for submitting my testimony. An argument took place between him and some of the lawyers about those arrested in Abdeen Police Station.

- Anyway, after waiting for more than 5 hours at the Prosecution Office, I went in to submit my testimony, and lawyers Ahmed Ragheb and Sayeda accompanied me, and the questions of the Prosecution started and I said what had happened:

- The fact that I was there by coincidence as I was having lunch at Riche Cafe

- Second, the march was a peaceful one and the numbers of those in it did not exceed 30 people with banners and flowers

- Third, the numbers of police officers present were extremely exaggerated and not proportional to those in the march

- Fourth, the police looked horrifying and were wearing masks which showed clearly that they were planning to attack the march

- Fifth, the police fired bullets (bird pellets) and tear gas in the span of minutes after the chanting had started (the chants were; Bread - Freedom - Social Justice) and was extremely peaceful

- Sixth, the march was viciously attacked and they were chased like locusts in Talaat Harb st.

- Seventh, the fact that one of the march protesters, namely Shaimaa ElSabbagh, was killed, that the police are the ones who killed her, and I swear to that.

- After the interrogation, we were shocked by the fact that the Prosecution was transforming me into a suspect and I was interrogated with as such, where the Prosecution officer stated that I was being arrested (Azza Soliman) in the Prosecution building, stating my age, describing my features and clothes and height, etc., and naturally we objected to what was happening and told him that this is not legal and that I am a volunteering witness, etc. However, the Prosecution officer started making statements that are illegal and which did not make any sense whatsoever. Anyway, the questions commenced and the accusations in the police report against the march stated that the demonstration did not have a permit issued, where rocks and fireworks were used to resist the police and attack them. Moreover, it stated that the police used water hoses to disperse the protesters, but they resisted. When I was asked what my statement to that was, I replied:

- The report is a lie and utterly fabricated, and I reiterated the violations committed by the police against the march that resulted in the murder of Shaimaa ElSabbagh.

Ahmed Ragheb requested that the suspect (who is myself) be released under any guarantee, and I strongly refused that and insisted on my release under the guarantee of my residence. The Prosecution officer intervened and told me that I would be released under the guarantee of my personal identity.

All this means the following:

1. The government decided to intimidate and silence all voices, even if one contemplated stating the truth via a testimony

2. All laws and institutions are being manipulated to assert the authority of the government
 3. Wearing out of any individual or groups that attempt to express any disdain from the government, or those supporting or helping those who have been treated in an unjust manner
 4. One of the sad ironies is the fact that between 12:30 and 1:00 a.m. an argument took place between me and the head of the Prosecution for the delay, and that a time should have been set for hearing my testimony, to which he responded: "Well, if you want to leave, go ahead". Which simply means that I am present at the Prosecution office at my own will to submit my testimony, and all of a sudden by some miracle I was transformed into being a suspect and they are the ones who decided to release me.
- Now, I really don't know what my legal position is in relation to the concerned case, in which the police is guilty of killing Shaimaa ElSabbagh. A witness by coincidence is transformed into a suspect, something that only happens in unjust police states like Egypt.

Azza Soliman

Lawyer

Age: 48 years old

24 January 2015