

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Egypt: Free expression still outlawed in Egypt**

Amnesty International has challenged the Egyptian government to mark this World Press Freedom Day, 3 May, by decriminalizing freedom of expression in Egypt.

In a letter to Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, the organization notes that Egyptian journalists and bloggers continue to face imprisonment and heavy fines, as well as harassment on the basis of criminal defamation charges, preventing the reporting of matters of public interest. This comes despite the president's own promise, in 2004, to end prison terms for publishing offences. Amendments of the Penal Code in 2006 failed to live up to that promise and many controversial provisions of the Penal Code and the Press Law remain in force.

In its letter, Amnesty International also noted the continued imprisonment of the blogger Karim Amer, who was sentenced in 2007 to four years in prison. He was charged with "spreading information disruptive of public order and damaging to the country's interest", "incitement to hate Islam" and "defaming the President of the Republic" under articles 102bis, 176 and 179 of the Penal Code.

Egypt's repressive legislation and practices were condemned by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), a group of human rights experts of the United Nations, when it ruled in November 2008 that Karim Amer has been arbitrarily detained, and called for his release. The WGAD also said that charges related to defamation, libel and slander should be dealt with by the Egyptian authorities under civil, not criminal, law, and that there should not be prison sentences for such charges. The WGAD stated:

"The fundamental right to freedom of opinion and expression, which is the core basis of the human rights system, must prevail when it implies political criticism, even when this criticism is focused in the activities of some concrete persons who have assumed high political responsibilities."

On 30 March, a symposium in Cairo marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1909 first ever demonstrations in Egypt for press freedom, when 25,000 people marched against the Publication Law of 1909, which gave the authorities the ability to close newspapers. The symposium's attendees, including Egyptian human rights organizations and activists, journalists, bloggers, writers and media workers, could only reflect how, 100 years later, freedom of opinion and expression in Egypt remains under threat.

Amnesty International now calls on the Egyptian authorities to begin a review of, or repeal, a number of articles in the Penal Code which allow for the imprisonment of journalists and others for their peaceful activities. These include Articles 80(d), 98bis(b), 98(f), 102, 102bis, 171, 178, 179, 181, 188, 201 and 308 of the Egyptian Penal Code, which have been frequently used to criminalize freedom of opinion and expression, and to punish journalists, bloggers and others who are considered to be critical of the authorities.

**Background:**

The decision of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention is available at:  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/un-experts-condemn-detention-egyptian-blogger-20090323>

In March 2008, Ibrahim Eissa, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *al-Dustour* was sentenced to six months in prison, reduced to two months by an appeal court in Cairo in September 2008. He was charged with publishing information considered by the authorities to be damaging to the public interest and Egypt's national stability under articles 171 and 188 of the Penal Code. The newspaper articles in question suggested that the president's health had deteriorated. He was pardoned by the president in October 2008.

Public Document

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