

PUBLIC

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UA 208/08 Fear of Ill-treatment/Freedom of assembly and expression

EGYPT  
Ahmed Afifi (m)  
Mohamed Taher (m)  
Ahmed Maher (m), aged 27, civil engineer  
13 other protesters

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Ahmed Afifi and Mohamed Taher were arrested while participating at a peaceful protest in the city of Alexandria on 23 July. It is not known where they are held and Amnesty International fears they are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Ahmed Maher and 13 other protesters are also in custody but are not believed to be at risk of torture nor other ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes all 16 to be prisoners of conscience, detained for their participation in the protest.

The protest was organized by a group calling itself "6 April Youth", which has gathered members through the Facebook social networking website. On 23 July, a national holiday in Egypt, about 35 members of the group, mainly university students, travelled from the capital, Cairo, to Alexandria to protest. It is believed that they chose to protest in Alexandria, Egypt's second city, in order to involve a wider number of people. Wearing "6 April" T-shirts, the group chanted slogans calling for political and economic reform in Egypt, and sang Egyptian patriotic songs. They were attacked by riot police and security forces using tear gas, who beat the protesters and forced them to lie on the ground.

Fifteen of the protesters, including Ahmed Afifi and Mohamed Taher, were arrested, while the others managed to flee. Thirteen of those arrested were taken to the El Pharana office of the State Security Intelligence (SSI) bureau in Alexandria. According to the testimony of some of the group, SSI officers threatened and verbally abused them. The next day, they appeared before a prosecutor in the Al Raml district of central Alexandria, who ordered their detention for 15 days pending further investigation. They were charged with organizing a gathering of more than five people in a public place, obstructing traffic, and gathering through the internet under the name of "6 April Youth" to incite people to overthrow the government and engage in civil disobedience. Some of the group have not had access to a lawyer. The 13 are believed to have been transferred to Hadra prison in Alexandria, but this has not been confirmed. Ahmed Afifi and Mohamed Taher have not been seen since their arrest, and there is no news of their whereabouts.

Ahmed Maher, one of the founders of the "6 April Youth" group, was arrested on 24 July in Alexandria, after leaving the protest. The same day he was charged with the same offences as the other protestors and is also believed to have been transferred to Hadra prison. Ahmed Maher was previously arrested on 7 May 2008 in Cairo after trying to organize another protest on the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Egyptian President. He was held for 12 hours in a Cairo police station, stripped and beaten, before being released without charge.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The name of the "6 April Youth" group refers to 6 April 2008, when a number of bloggers, activists and opposition groups called for a general strike across the country in support of action by textile workers in the city of Mahalla, north of Cairo. Though the industrial action was called off after negotiations with officials and under pressure from the government, violent protests broke out in the city on 6 and 7 April against the rising cost of living. Three people were killed and dozens were wounded due to excessive use of force by security forces, many of whom were also injured. Fifty-five people continue to be detained in connection with this violence. On 9 August 49 of these 55 individuals will appear before the Emergency State Security Court

(ESSC) in the Nile delta city of Tanta, north of Cairo. They face charges of participating in an illegal gathering likely to "disturb the public order" and destroying public property, among other things. Trials conducted before ESSCs routinely fall short of international fair trial standards.

In Egypt, the internet has emerged as a major forum for expressing views critical of the Egyptian authorities and exposing human rights abuses in the country. For example, bloggers in Egypt have been instrumental in publicizing videos of torture and other ill-treatment in police stations. Bloggers continue to face threats and harassment for their work as rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly continue to be restricted in Egypt.

The national holiday on 23 July commemorates the anniversary of the 1952 revolution which brought the end of the Egyptian monarchy and the establishment of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or English or your own language:**

- urging the authorities to immediately reveal the whereabouts of Ahmed Afifi and Mohamed Taher and enable them to have access to a doctor and lawyer of their choice, and ensure that they are treated humanely and are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment;
- urging the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release them and all other members of the "6 April Youth" Facebook group, since Amnesty International believes them to be prisoners of conscience detained merely for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression in a protest on the seafront of central Alexandria;
- calling for a thorough and impartial investigation into allegations that the protesters were beaten by riot police and security forces, and that SSI agents verbally abused and threatened the protesters at the El Pharana SSI office, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of Interior

Minister Habib Ibrahim El Adly  
Ministry of the Interior  
25 Al-Sheikh Riham Street, Bab al-Louk, Cairo, Egypt

**Fax: +20 22 279 0682**

**Email: moi@idsc.gov.eg**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Public Prosecutor

Counsellor Abdel Meguid Mahmoud  
Dar al-Qadha al-'Ali  
Ramses Street, Cairo, EGYPT

**Fax: +20 22 577 4716**

**Salutation: Dear Counsellor**

**COPIES TO:**

National Council for Human Rights

Ambassador Mokhless Kotb  
Secretary General, National Council for Human Rights  
1113 Corniche El Nil, Midane Al Tahrir, Specialized National Councils Building – 11th floor  
NDP Building, Cairo, Egypt

**Fax: +20 22 574 7497**

**Email: nchr@nchr.org.eg**

and to diplomatic representatives of Egypt accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 September 2008.