

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**EGYPT: @JOURNALIST DETAINED**

On Friday 25 January police arrested Magdy Ahmed Hussein as he left a Cairo mosque. Magdy Ahmed Hussein, a former member of parliament, is deputy secretary general of the opposition Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and deputy editor of its weekly newspaper, al-Sha'ab (The People). According to information received by Amnesty International he attended Friday noon prayers at the mosque of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz in his former constituency in Shubra, Cairo. After the prayers he is reported to have spoken against the war with Iraq, which he said did not serve the interests of the Arabs but of the United States of America, and to have condemned the attacks on the Iraqi armed forces and people. He was arrested as he left the mosque and later the same day was brought before the Niyaba (procuracy or state prosecutor's department), which ordered him to be kept in custody for 15 days.

The procuracy may, acting in the capacity of investigating judge, extend his detention for further periods of 15 days up to a maximum of 60 days, before bringing Magdy Ahmed Hussein before a court. He is believed to be held at Tora Prison, in a Cairo suburb, and has had access to his lawyer.

According to reports received by Amnesty International, Magdy Ahmed Hussein has been charged under Articles 80 and 102 of the penal code. These broadly phrased articles relate, among other things, to spreading false or tendentious information in time of war which could damage war preparations or operations, provoke panic or alarm among people, or put public security or the public interest at risk.

Witnesses at the mosque at the time of his arrest have reported that there was no sign of violence or trouble among those gathered there. Amnesty International believes Magdy Ahmed Hussein may be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the non-violent expression of his beliefs. Egypt is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees, among other things, freedom of opinion and expression. It also requires that all detainees be brought before a court "without delay" to decide whether their detention is lawful.

In recent months there have been mass arrests among members and sympathizers of Islamic groups in Egypt and among Palestinians, Iraqis and other Arab nationals living in Egypt who are suspected of being opposed to the Egyptian government's policy in the Gulf.

The first wave of arrests came in the wake of the assassination, in October 1990, of the Speaker of the People's Assembly, Dr Rifa'at al-Mahgoub. Amnesty International received allegations that some of those held at that time were tortured. More recent arrests have taken place throughout Egypt of individuals criticizing Egypt's role in the Gulf war and the attacks on Iraq.