

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 12/28/96

UA 285/96 Torture / Fear of torture / Possible
prisoner of conscience

5 December 1996

EGYPT Mohammad Wagdi Mohammad Durra, aged 22

Amnesty International fears that Mohammad Wagdi Mohammad Durra, allegedly tortured after arrest by members of the State Security Investigations Department (SSI), may be returned to the custody of the SSI where he would be at risk of further torture. Furthermore, he appears to be a prisoner of conscience, detained because of his conversion from Islam to Christianity.

Mohammad Wagdi Mohammad Durra, a former student at Mansoura University, was reportedly arrested at his home in Tanta at 2:30am on 10 October 1996. The arresting officers searched the house, confiscating a number of books on religious themes, and took him to the SSI building in Tanta, where he was allegedly tortured. He was held there until 12 October, when he was brought before the State Security Prosecution in Cairo. Charges brought against him reportedly included "propagating ideas" and "belittling religions". He was given a 15-day detention order pending further investigations. Instead of taking him to Tanta Prison, state security officers allegedly took him back to the SSI building where he was held until 14 October. He was then transferred to Tanta Prison where he is currently held pending the outcome of further investigations.

Fears for Mohammad Wagdi Mohammad Durra's safety should he be returned to the SSI building in Tanta are further heightened by reports that he had been detained and tortured there on two earlier occasions following his conversion from Islam to Christianity at the end of 1994. He was first arrested on 7 January 1995 and held in the SSI building for approximately two weeks. Then on 13 April 1996, he was summoned to the SSI building and held there for approximately one week, allegedly in an attempt to force him to inform on the activities of other individuals who had converted from Islam to Christianity. He was allegedly tortured during each period of detention by methods including electric shocks applied to various parts of his body, beatings, suspension by his wrists and being left for long periods clothed only in his under-clothes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has learned over the years of a number of cases where Muslims who have converted to Christianity have been detained, sometimes for months at a time, apparently as a result of the non-violent expression of their religious beliefs. Thousands of suspected members or sympathizers of banned Islamist groups also continue to be subjected to periods of prolonged administrative detention, in some cases of up to six years.

In its May 1996 report, the United Nations Committee Against Torture concluded that the torture and ill-treatment of political detainees is being practised systematically in Egypt. The report stated that "torture is systematically practised by the Security forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence". The Committee urged the Egyptian Government to exercise control over the activities of the security forces in the country and to set up a "thorough investigation into the conduct of the police forces in order to establish the truth or otherwise of the many allegations of acts of torture, bring the persons responsible for those acts before the courts and issue and transmit to the police specific and clear instructions designed to prohibit any act of torture in the future."

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- calling for Mohammad Wagdi Mohammad Durra's immediate and unconditional release if, as appears to be the case, he is being held solely on account of his conscientiously-held religious beliefs;
- expressing concern at the alleged torture of Mohammad Wagdi Mohammad Durra after arrest in the SSI building in Tanta, and on two earlier occasions in January 1995 and April 1996;
- seeking assurances that he will be protected from any form of torture or ill-treatment for as long as he is in detention;
- urging that a full, independent and impartial be carried out into the allegations of torture against him, that the methods and findings of this investigation be made public within reasonable time and that anyone implicated in perpetrating the torture against him be brought to justice without delay.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Mohammad Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
'Abedine Palace, Cairo, Egypt

Telegrams: President Mubarak, Cairo, Egypt

Telexes: 93794 WAZRA UN

Salutation: Your Excellency

General Hassan al-Alfy
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Al-Sheikh rihan Street
bab al-Louk
Cairo, egypt

Telexes: 21361 MOICM

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Cairo, Egypt

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Al-Mustashar Ahmad Sayyid Ahmad
Assistant Public Prosecutor and
Head of the human Rights Department
The Public Prosecutors Office
Dar al-Qadha al-'Ali
Ramses Street, Cairo, Egypt

Ms Nayla Gabr
The Human Rights Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo, Egypt
Faxes: (20 2)574 7839

Dr Fathi Sorour
Speaker
The People's Assembly
Magles al-Sha'ab Street, Cairo, Egypt

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 17 January 1997.