

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 12/36/97

UA 183/97 Prisoners of conscience / Fear of further POCs

19 June 1997

EGYPTHamdein Sabbahi, journalist
Mohammad 'Abdu, veterinarian
Mohammad Sulayman Fayyad, lawyer
Hamdi Haykal, lawyer

Four people are reported to have been arrested in Egypt for their non-violent opposition to a new agricultural law, known as Law 96 of 1992, which permits landowners to evict tenants after a grace period. Amnesty International believes that the four are prisoners of conscience, and is concerned that their arrests may herald a clampdown on activists critical of Law 96. The authorities should, as a matter of urgency, release the four and ensure that no others are arrested for exercising their right to peacefully campaign against the new law.

Hamdein Sabbahi was arrested, allegedly without judicial warrant, by officers from the State Security Investigations Department (SSI) from his home in Cairo at dawn on 17 June 1997. His office was said to have been raided by SSI officers and some documents were reportedly confiscated. He was interrogated in the presence of his lawyers at the State Security Prosecution in North Cairo.

Mohammad 'Abdu, Mohammad Sulayman Fayyad and Hamdi Haykal, were arrested on the same day in the town of Banha, north of Cairo, allegedly after criticizing Law 96 of 1992 in a public gathering.

Charges against the four reportedly include possession of printed material critical of Law 96 of 1992 and inciting farmers to oppose the law by peaceful means such as signing petitions and organizing strikes. The four have now each been given a 15-day detention order pending the outcome of further investigations. They were held in Doqqi police station before their interrogation, but Amnesty International does not know where they are currently held.

Fears that these arrests may herald the beginning of a clampdown against critics of Law 96 - which is due to come on to the statute books in October 1997 - are raised by the fact that they follow the recent detention, on similar grounds, of Dr Ahmad al-Ahwany. The latter, a university professor, was arrested on 24 April in Cairo after he was found in possession of a bulletin critical of Law 96. He was held for several weeks in Istiqbal Tora Prison before he was released on 21 May (see UA 130/97, MDE 12/21/97, 2 May and updates).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Scores of individuals have been arrested in Egypt in recent years and detained without trial for short periods of time, as a result of their peaceful opposition political activities. Others have been formally charged, tried and sentenced to prison terms and remain detained as prisoners of conscience as a result of such activities, among them 53 alleged members of the *Muslim Brothers* organization sentenced in November 1995 to prison terms of up to five years with hard labour. The charges against them included "membership of a banned organization, plotting to change the present regime through the infiltration of vital institutions with a view to setting up an Islamic state and possession of anti-government literature. However, the real reason for their arrest, detention and subsequent conviction is believed to have been that some of them

had been planning to stand as independent candidates in the parliamentary elections in November and December 1995.

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

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Hamdein Sabbahi, Mohammad 'Abdu, Mohammad Sulayman Fayyad and Hamdi Haykal as prisoners of conscience held solely for their non-violent activities against Law 96 of 1992;
- seeking information regarding their legal status and their current whereabouts;
- seeking assurances that they are being humanely treated and have access to their lawyers, families and to medical care if necessary;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that no others are arrested and detained for exercising their right to peacefully criticize and protest against Law 96 of 1992.

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

Telex: 21361 MOICM UN

Fax: +202 355 7792

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Cairo, Egypt

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Ms Nayla Gabr
The Human Rights Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo, Egypt

Faxes: +202 574 9808

Mr Raga' al-'Arabi
Public Prosecutor
Dar al-Qadha al-'Ali
Ramses Street
Cairo
Egypt

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 1 August 1997.