

AI Index: PRE 01/395/2010
21 November 2010

Egyptian authorities urged to uphold human rights during election

Amnesty International today called on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that all candidates and voters are not harassed or intimidated by security forces, supporters of the ruling party and others during the country's parliamentary elections on 28 November.

The organization's warning comes amid fresh restrictions by the Egyptian authorities on political opposition activists, clamping down on their freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

"The Egyptian authorities must uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly and ensure that peaceful protestors are not arbitrarily arrested and detained. The rights of all candidates and campaigners should be upheld without discrimination," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Voters at polling stations should be protected by the Egyptian security forces, not intimidated or harassed by them as so often occurred during the last parliamentary elections in 2005." Egyptians criticizing the authorities, or considered a threat to public order or security, have faced arrest, detention, criminal charges and the threat of detention without charge or trial under the emergency law.

Egypt has remained under a continuous state of emergency for almost 30 years, since 1981. In the run-up to the elections, the Egyptian authorities have also acted to restrict public access to information and undermine political opposition.

Newspapers whose reports the authorities consider politically-sensitive have been seized or destroyed. Media sources say a dozen Egyptian satellite television channels have been suspended. Activists from political parties, as well as movements such as the National Association for Change, which campaigns for political reform to allow for free and fair elections, have faced harassment from the authorities and sometimes even detention.

Hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood have been arrested since 9 October when its Chairman, Mohamed Badie', said it would field candidates for election. Around 250 of the group's supporters are said to be still detained.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been banned officially since 1954 yet operates openly and is widely seen as the main opposition to the ruling National Democratic Party. As a banned organization, it cannot directly contest the elections but has previously proved its strength by successfully promoting independent candidates.

Levels of human rights abuses during November's elections are seen as indicative of what may occur next year when new presidential elections will be held. The current President, Hosni Mubarak, has been in power since 1981.

“The eyes of the world will be on the conduct of the Egyptian authorities during this election. It’s an opportunity for them to show that Egypt can be a place where human rights are respected,” said Malcolm Smart

Calls for an end to the 29-year old state of emergency, which was most recently renewed for two years in May 2010, and growing dissatisfaction with government policies are heightening tensions in the run-up to the November elections.

“Egypt’s state of emergency and the Emergency Law have long facilitated violations of rights abuses throughout Egypt,” said Malcolm Smart. “It is high time that they were removed.”