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Egypt: Final verdict in trial of human rights defenders

On 18 March 2003 Egypt's Court of Cassation is expected to pronounce a final verdict in the trial against human rights defenders Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies (IKCDS).

"Egypt must abolish or review legislation which violates international standards and which stipulates prison sentences for the mere exercise of freedom of expression."

"The politically motivated charges on which Saad Eddin Ibrahim and other human rights defenders were convicted and imprisoned in the past are a pretext to punish them for criticizing government policies," Amnesty International said.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim is facing several charges for which he received seven years' imprisonment in the past, including "disseminating false information harmful to Egypt's interest". This charge relates to a document of the IKCDS noting irregularities during elections and discrimination against religious minorities. Amnesty International is concerned that the above charge, which carries up to five years imprisonment, is in violation of international human rights law on freedom of expression.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim also faces charges of receiving donations without authorization based on Military Decree No.4 of 1992 which sets out a minimum of seven and maximum of 15 years' imprisonment. Amnesty International believes that the trial of Saad Eddin Ibrahim is the only case in Egypt in which these restrictive regulations on funding have led to a conviction and that this charge has been selectively used against him as a human rights defender.

In November 2002 the UN Human Rights Committee, charged with monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, expressed concern "at restrictions placed by Egyptian legislation and practice on the foundation of non-governmental organizations and the activities of such organizations such as efforts to secure foreign funding."

Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur are both charged with embezzlement of funds granted by the European Commission for political awareness projects. However, the European Commission has stated that the projects of the IKCDS were the "subject of external mid-term audits whose reports gave no concern, financial, or otherwise".

Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur were adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience after they were sentenced to seven and two years' imprisonment, respectively, in the two previous trials.

Background

In May 2001 the Supreme State Security Court sentenced Saad Eddin Ibrahim to seven years' imprisonment on the basis of several charges, including receiving unauthorized funding and dissemination of false information abroad. Three staff members of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies were sentenced to two years' imprisonment for collaborating with Saad Eddin Ibrahim.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim and the other prisoners were temporarily released after the Court of Cassation ordered a retrial in February 2002. In a retrial before another circuit of the Supreme State Security Court Saad Eddin Ibrahim and his colleague Nadia 'Abd al-Nur were sentenced in July 2002 to seven and two years' imprisonment respectively. On 3 December 2002 the Court of Cassation ordered a final retrial in the case against Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur.

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