

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 12/022/2002 (Public)  
News Service No: 107  
25 June 2002

**Embargo Date: 25 June 2002 00:00 GMT**

## **Egypt: Stop criminalizing human rights activists**

On the occasion of today's hearing in the retrial of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the director of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, and other human rights defenders Amnesty International calls on the Egyptian authorities to stop criminalizing human rights activists.

"With this politically motivated trial of Saad Eddin Ibrahim and his colleagues, Egyptian authorities intend to silence the whole Egyptian human rights movement," said Amnesty International.

In May 2001 the Supreme State Security Court had sentenced Saad Eddin Ibrahim to seven years' imprisonment on the basis of several charges, including receiving unauthorized funding and dissemination of false information abroad. After the Court of Cassation ordered a retrial in February 2002 Saad Eddin Ibrahim and the other prisoners were released. In April 2002 the retrial was opened before another circuit of the Supreme State Security Court.

On 3 June 2002 Egypt's Parliament passed a law regulating non-governmental organizations (NGO) in Egypt, which imposes a wide range of restrictions on the management, operation and financing of NGOs. The law provides criminal penalties for offences even if they amount to no more than the exercise of freedom of association as guaranteed in international treaties.

"This law seriously curtails the right to freedom of association as guaranteed in international law," Amnesty International said.

The new law is largely based on Law 153 of 1999, which was ruled unconstitutional in June 2000 on procedural grounds. In May 2000 the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concerns regarding Law 153, noting that it "gives the government control over the rights of NGOs to manage their own activities, including seeking external funding."

"The ongoing trial against human rights activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim and the new NGO Law are threatening the development of civil society in Egypt, in particular the human rights movement," Amnesty International said.

### **BACKGROUND**

The new law has retained the restrictive regulations of the previous law. Under the new law, NGOs must receive prior approval by the authorities for several activities, including conducting board elections (Article 34), joining an organization outside Egypt (Article 16) and receiving funding from abroad (Article 17).

In addition the new law introduces provisions, which entitle the Ministry of Social Affairs to order the dissolution of an NGO without having to seek the ruling of a court. Reasons for ordering the dissolution can include engagement in prohibited political or unionist activities and receipt of unauthorized funding from abroad.

Public Document

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