

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 12/036/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 186
18 October 2002

Egypt: Opening of trial of three Britons and 23 Egyptians raises unfair trial and torture concerns

Two days before the trial of three Britons and 23 Egyptians in Egypt on Sunday 20 October, Amnesty International expressed serious concerns that they are to be tried before an exceptional court and that allegations that the men have been tortured and ill-treated remain uninvestigated.

The three British men -- Maajid Nawaz, Ian Malcolm Nisbett and Reza Pankhurst -- are due to be tried with 23 Egyptian nationals in an (Emergency) Supreme State Security Court in Cairo, an exceptional court which violates international fair trial standards. These courts deny defendants the right to appeal against verdicts.

The men, whose case was reportedly raised with the Egyptian authorities by UK Foreign Minister Jack Straw during a recent visit to the country, are charged with offences related to membership of the Islamic Liberation Party (*Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami*), which is lawful in the UK but banned in Egypt.

Of particular concern to Amnesty International are reports that the British men were tortured and ill-treated shortly after their arrest in Cairo on 1 April 2002. Along with a fourth Briton -- Hassan Rizfi -- who was later released, the British men allege that they were tortured at Cairo's State Security Intelligence building, where past cases of systematic torture have been documented.

During a fact finding mission to the country from 27 September to 6 October, an Amnesty International delegation was denied access to the men and other detainees and prisoners despite having requested permission from the Egyptian authorities in advance.

Amnesty International said: "Reports that these men were tortured are deeply worrying and our concerns have grown following the apparent intransigence of the Egyptian authorities who are refusing to allow independent medical examinations of the men."

"The fact that the Egyptian authorities recently denied an Amnesty International delegation access to the men only adds to our concern for their welfare."

"With Egyptian prisons already teeming with thousands of prisoners held without charge or trial, or following unfair trials, our fear is that these men will be convicted and sentenced after an unfair trial. We are pressing the Egyptian authorities to ensure a fair trial which includes the right of appeal."

The four British men were administratively held for over 12 weeks under the order of the Interior

Minister based on provisions of emergency legislation. They were formally charged in August and have since been held in pre-trial detention. To date Maajid Nawaz, Ian Malcolm Nisbett, Reza Pankhurst have spent more than six months in detention.

In April and May 2002, scores of Egyptians were also detained for their alleged affiliation with the *Hizb al-Tahir al-Islami*. Many of these were held for weeks in incommunicado detention at premises of the State Security Intelligence and Amnesty International has received information that several of them were subjected to electric shocks and other forms of torture and ill-treatment.

For more information please see:

'Egypt: No access to prisons for Amnesty International delegates' press release (8 October 2002):
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/MDE120332002?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\EGYPT>

Egypt: Fifty-one convicted in unfair' press release (10 September 2002):
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/MDE120282002?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\EGYPT>

'Egypt: Continuing repression of non-violent political activities' press release (30 July 2002):
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/MDE120272002?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\EGYPT>

'Egypt: Torture allegations concerning four Britons must be investigated' press release (3 July 2002):
<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/cgi-bin/eatsoup.cgi?id=PSQRJtRDxIcAAEHK7Yo&a=>

'Egypt: Torture remains rife as cries for justice go unheeded' report (28 February 2001):
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/MDE120012001?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\EGYPT>

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