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Egypt: Release human rights defenders

On 3 December 2002 the Court of Cassation is due to pronounce its decision regarding the final appeal in the case of Saad Eddin Ibrahim and other human rights defenders.

"The charges on which Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur were convicted and imprisoned in a retrial in July 2002 are a pretext to punish them for criticizing government policies. They should be immediately and unconditionally released," Amnesty International said.

The Egyptian government has been criticized by national and international human rights organizations and UN bodies for its restrictive policy on non-governmental organizations.

In November 2002 the UN Human Rights Committee, charged with overseeing 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."

"The Egyptian government must end muzzling civil society activists. By targeting Saad Eddin Ibrahim and his colleagues the authorities intend to threaten the Egyptian human rights movement into silence," Amnesty International added.

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 July 2002 the retrial was opened before another circuit of the Supreme State Security Court in which Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur were sentenced to seven and two years' imprisonment respectively (*see Egypt: Imprisonment of human rights defenders - AI Index: MDE 12/016/2001*).

Human rights defenders are among dozens of men and women in Egypt detained or imprisoned solely for the non-violent expression of their political views or religious beliefs. Among them are political activists, including members of the banned Muslim Brothers, and members of non-political religious groups accused of "contempt of religion".

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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