

8 June 2001

AI Index MDE 12/015/2001 - News Service Nr. 100

Egypt: Concerns over detention of alleged gays

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about the ongoing detention of scores of men in Egypt in connection with their sexual orientation, the international organization said today.

On 6 and 7 June 2001 54 men were brought before the public prosecution in Cairo facing accusations of immoral behaviour and contempt of religion. The men remain in detention since their arrest during the early hours of 11 May 2001. The following day, they were brought before the public prosecution where they were issued with a detention order and transferred to Tora Prison where they continue to be held.

Amnesty International believes that the majority, if not all, of these men are detained purely on the grounds of their alleged sexual orientation, the organization said. If people are detained solely on account of their sexual orientation, Amnesty International would consider them prisoners of conscience and call for their immediate and unconditional release.

During the hearings on 6 and 7 June, the results of forensic medical examinations of all the detainees were presented. According to Amnesty International's information, these examinations were primarily conducted in order to establish whether the men had practised anal sex.

Media coverage of this incident by Egyptian newspapers has centred on the alleged sexual orientation of the men, portraying the men

in a negative light. In many instances detailed information pertaining to the men has been published in the press, including names of those arrested, in some cases their places of work and in one case even the family address of one of the detainees.

Amnesty International is also extremely concerned about allegations that the detainees were tortured or ill-treated during the first days of their detention. There were also reports of ill-treatment during their arrest. These serious allegations should be promptly investigated by the Egyptian authorities.

A few days after the arrest Amnesty International wrote to the Public Prosecutor expressing its concerns and seeking further clarification about the detention of these men. The organization has still not received a response.

Background

Amnesty International believes that the vilification and persecution of persons for their sexuality violate the most fundamental principles of international human rights law.

The right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual orientation, is recognized in regional and international treaties, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is a state party.

Contempt of religion is prohibited under Article 98 (f) of the Egyptian Penal Code and stipulates prison sentences of between six months and five years. Amnesty International has repeatedly criticized the use of this vaguely worded article which has been used as the legal pretext for the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience. Earlier this year

writer Salah al-Din Muhsin was sentenced to three years= imprisonment under Article 98 (f) for "offending religion" in his publications. Charged with violating the same article, Manal Wahid Mana>i, the alleged leader of a religious group, and three of her followers were sentenced to prison terms of between three and five years in September 2000. Amnesty International considers these men and women to be prisoners of conscience.

\ENDS

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>