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MEDIA ADVISORY

EGYPT

Amnesty International observes unfair trial of prisoners of conscience

Amnesty International delegates will observe a hearing in the trial of 20 alleged members of the Muslim Brothers on 12 March 2000. The trial is taking place at the Supreme Military Court in the army barracks of Heikstep, north-east of Cairo.

Key concerns regarding this trial:

Amnesty International considers the detainees to be prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release. Amnesty International delegates observed the hearing of the trial on 7 March 2000 during which the president of the court confirmed that the defendants were not accused of using violence.

This trial of civilians violates some of the most fundamental requirements of international law, as well as of Egypt's solemn treaty commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. These include the right to be tried before an independent and impartial court, and the right to appeal to a higher court.

Background

The 20 men, the majority of whom hold leading positions in professional bodies such as the Bar Association and the Engineers' Syndicate, have been charged in connection with their alleged affiliation with an illegal group aiming at "obstructing the law and disturbing the social peace".

On 27 October 1999 President Mubarak issued a special decree referring the case to a military court and trial began on 25 December 1999. The verdict or sentence of a military court cannot be appealed or reviewed by a higher court.

ENDS.../

For further information, please contact the Amnesty International delegates in Cairo between 11 and 13 March 2000 on the following mobile phone number: +(20) 12-2835404.