

AI Index: PRE01/018/2011  
17 January 2011

## **Egyptian authorities urged to drop death sentence for sectarian killings**

Amnesty international has condemned the death sentence imposed on a man found guilty of sectarian killings in Egypt and called on the authorities there to stop circumventing the criminal justice system by using emergency courts.

Mohamed Ahmed Hussein was yesterday sentenced to death by an Emergency Supreme State Security Court for the killing of six Coptic Christians and a Muslim police guard in a drive-by shooting as worshippers left a church in the city of Nagaa Hammadi on 6 January 2010.

“We call on the Egyptian authorities to commute the death sentence against Mohamed Ahmed Hussein,” said Amnesty International.

“It is all the more disturbing that his case has been heard in a court that allows no appeal, denying the defendant fundamental fair trial guarantees. This practice is a short-cut to the criminal justice system and must be stopped.

“We deplore the tragic death of the six worshippers and the police guard but we fear that such a harsh penalty might not be based on the evidence available but rather to show the determination of the authorities to combat sectarian violence, especially after the Alexandria church bombing”.

Sentences issued by emergency courts, which are often used for politically-sensitive cases, are not subject to appeal. After the Grand Mufti, Egypt’s top religious authority, the court will then announce the sentence as final and it is up to the President to ratify or commute it.

Hussein’s lawyer told Amnesty International that although procedures during the trial were followed correctly, he does not believe the evidence for Hussein’s guilt to be compelling. Hussein has denied that he was responsible for the killings.

Hussein’s sentence came two weeks after a bomb attack on a Coptic Church in Alexandria on 1 January, which killed 23 people. Amnesty International fears that the Egyptian authorities want to appease tensions between religious communities by taking a tough approach to sectarian violence.

“The death sentence should not be used to address sectarian violence and will certainly not prevent future violent incidents”, said Amnesty International. “The Egyptian authorities should begin by lifting all the legal and other restrictive measures in place against Copts and other religious minorities”.

The sentences of Hussein’s two alleged accomplices, Qurshi Abu al-Haggag Mohamed and Hindawi El-Sayyef Mohamed, are expected to be pronounced on 20 February.

Amnesty International urges the Egyptian authorities to commute all death sentences and strictly adhere

to international standards for fair trial.

**For further background**, please Amnesty International's report of 12 January 2010: [\*Egyptian authorities failing to protect religious minorities\*](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/001/2010)