

To: Health Professionals  
From: Health and Human Rights Team  
Date: 08 July 2004

## **Medical Action**

### **Egypt: Medical Center harassed and intimidated by authorities, faces imminent closure**

#### **Summary**

The Cairo-based Nadim Centre for the Psychological Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence has recently been subject to harassment and intimidation by the Egyptian authorities and faces the threat of closure on 18 August 2004. The Centre provides vital psychological treatment and rehabilitation for torture victims, including those tortured by the police and security forces and women suffering domestic violence. It also treats refugees, predominantly Sudanese nationals, tortured in their country of origin. The Centre's work with refugees is particularly valuable at a time when Sudan struggles with a human rights crisis.

#### **Instructions to coordinators**

Because of the threat of closure on 18 August, we are requesting that appeals be sent as soon as possible.

#### **Relevant materials**

See web action at: <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/egy-020804-action-eng> (English) or <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/egy-020804-action-ara> (Arabic)

The text for a brief letter of appeal is included in the web action. However, more substantive letters from health professionals, using the points included in the recommended actions, are considered particularly important.

#### **Background Information**

On 11 July a committee of inspection from the Ministry of Health visited the Nadim Center for the Psychological Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence. Amnesty International has received information that the three members of the committee acted in "aggressive and abusive" manner and transgressed its legal duties under Law 51 of 1981 on Medical Establishments. In particular, it appears that they did not look at medical equipment and took personal files and documentation belonging to the centre and the doctors. In addition, they allegedly harassed staff of the centre and showed no concern for patients present in the clinic at the time of the inspection.

On 19 July the centre received a letter from the Ministry of Health accusing it of a number of breaches and giving it a period of 30 days to correct them or be held accountable before the law. According to the law, the authorities can close down the centre for as long as they continue to find "major breaches".

The most serious accusation waged against the centre relates to the centre carrying out unauthorized activities as a medical establishment. At the time of writing, these activities had not been specified but it is feared that the authorities refer to legitimate human rights work carried out by staff of the centre.

Other accusations relate to a lack of medical equipment necessary for a medical establishment; a lack of first aid equipment; the absence of the medical director at the time of the visit; the presence of an unreported doctor; and the issuance of prescriptions under a previous address.

Established in 1993, the Centre has provided treatment to people tortured at the hands of the Egyptian police and the security forces as well as victims of domestic violence. They have also carried out the important task of recording cases of torture both by taking down personal testimonies and by means of medical documentation. The centre is affiliated to the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, an international network based in Copenhagen (see: <http://www.irct.org>).

The threat to the Nadim Centre is part of a trend in recent years during which the Egyptian government has clamped down on non-governmental organizations, forcing them to operate under the shadow of a restrictive law that regulates their activities and even criminalizes acts amounting to no more than the exercise of freedom of association. The work of organizations, such as the Nadim Center,

is crucial in a context in which torture and ill-treatment are systematically practised in places of detention.

## **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

### **Letter-writing**

#### **1 To the Egyptian authorities:**

Please write letters as soon as possible in your own words and on headed paper if you use this in your profession. Use the following points as guidelines:

- Introduce yourself as a health professional concerned with human rights;
- Express concern at the harassment and intimidation of the Nadim Centre for the Psychological Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and the possible threat of its closure. In particular, express concern at reports of the aggressive and abusive manner in which the inspection committee from the Ministry of Health conducted its inspection of the centre on 11 July, in the presence of torture victims. Mention in particular reports of the confiscation of personal files and documentation belonging to the centre and doctors, the alleged harassment of staff and their lack of concern for patients present;
- Express concern that the center has been accused of carrying out unspecified unauthorized activities and urge the authorities to clarify what these are;
- Urge the authorities to take immediate and decisive steps to end torture in Egypt, in particular to ensure that those engaged in fighting against torture can freely pursue their activities.

#### **2 To the Nadim Center:**

Please write letters of solidarity to staff of the Nadim Center.

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### **COPIES**

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### **Text of brief letter in web action:**

Your Excellency

I am deeply concerned at the harassment and intimidation faced by the Nadim Center for the Psychological Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and the possible threat of its closure.

I urge you to ensure that the centre is allowed to continue to carry out its vital work for victims of torture who have suffered abuse in Egypt and elsewhere.

Your government must take immediate and decisive steps to end torture in Egypt. This includes ensuring that those engaged in fighting against torture can pursue their activities unhindered.

Sincerely