

EXTERNAL

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Fear of Torture

9 January 1998

EGYPT Mohammad Hussein Mohammad Ibrahim Sallam, aged 32

Mohammad Hussein Mohammad Ibrahim Sallam, an Egyptian Christian convert, was reportedly arrested on 4 January 1998 at Cairo Airport. His whereabouts are unknown and Amnesty International fears he is at risk of torture.

Mohammad Hussein Mohammad Ibrahim Sallam and his British wife have resided in Lebanon for the past year and were in Egypt for a two week holiday. She has since returned to Lebanon. He was previously arrested, together with two other Christian converts, in September 1990 and detained for nine months during which time they were allegedly tortured. Amnesty International considered them to be prisoners of conscience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years there have been a number of cases involving the detention, sometimes for months at a time, and torture of Christians who have converted from Islam. This is apparently for their non-violent expression of their conscientiously-held beliefs.

Torture of political prisoners continues to be systematic, particularly in the headquarters of the State Security Investigations Department (SSI) in Lazoghly Square, Cairo, but also in other SSI branches in the country, police stations and occasionally prisons. The most common torture methods reported are: electric shocks, beatings, suspension by the wrists or ankles, burning with cigarettes, and various forms of psychological torture, including death threats and threats of rape or sexual abuse of the detainee or their female relatives. Lawyers and local human rights groups have lodged hundreds of complaints of torture with the Public Prosecutor's Office, but no impartial investigations are known to have been conducted.

In May 1996 the United Nations Committee against Torture issued a report summarizing the results of a confidential inquiry carried out since 1991 over a period of five years. It concluded that *"torture is systematically practised by the Security Forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence"*.

The Committee urged the Egyptian Government to *"make particular efforts to prevent its security forces from acting as a State within a State, for they seem to escape control by superior authorities"*. The Egyptian Government has so far failed to implement any of the recommendations made by the Committee.

Among those recommendations were the need to *"set up an independent investigation machinery, including in its composition judges, lawyers and medical doctors, that should efficiently examine all the allegations of torture, in order to bring them expeditiously before the courts. This independent group should also monitor the safeguards against torture guaranteed to persons deprived of their liberty under Egyptian law, in particular by having access to all the places where allegations of torture have been reported...."*

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest of Mohammad Hussein Mohammad Ibrahim Sallam and urging his immediate and unconditional release unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- seeking assurances that he is being humanely treated;

- urging that he be given immediate access to a lawyer of his own choosing, to his family and to medical care if required.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency General Habib al-'Adeli
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Al-Sheikh Riham Street, Bab al-Louk, Cairo, Egypt
Telegrams: Minister Habib al-'Adeli, Cairo, Egypt
Telexes: 21361 MOICM UN
Faxes: + 202 355 7792
Salutation: Dear Minister

His Excellency Faruq Sayf al-Nasr
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Midan Lazoghly, Cairo, Egypt
Telegrams: Minister Sayf al-Nasr, Cairo, Egypt
Faxes: + 202 355 8103
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Ms Nayla Gabr
The Human Rights Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo, Egypt

Mr Raga' al-'Arabi
Public Prosecutor
Dar al-Qadha al-'Ali
Ramses Street, Cairo, Egypt

and to diplomatic representatives of Egypt accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 February 1998.