

Embargoed for : 20/06/2001 05:00 GMT

Egypt: Human rights defenders Saad Eddin Ibrahim and his colleagues must be released

Amnesty International called on the Egyptian government to release immediately and unconditionally human rights defenders Saad Eddin Ibrahim and three of his colleagues at the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development studies (IKCDS).

On 18 June 2001 the Supreme State Security Court issued the written verdict in the trial of Ibrahim and 27 others.

"The written verdict confirms that the charges against Ibrahim and three of his colleagues are simply a pretext used to punish them for the exercise of their right to freedom of expression," Amnesty International said.

*In a report published today, **Egypt: Imprisonment of human rights defenders**, Amnesty International said Ibrahim and his three colleagues are prisoners of conscience.*

Since these charges related to IKCDS projects funded by the European Union, Amnesty International called on the EU to urge the Egyptian authorities to release Ibrahim and his colleagues and to publicly state that their persecution and detention contradict the spirit of the Barcelona Declaration and the forthcoming Association Agreement between the EU and Egypt.

Ibrahim, who heads the IKCDS, was sentenced on 21 May 2001 by the Supreme State Security Court in Cairo to seven years' imprisonment after being convicted of receiving funding without authorization, dissemination of false information abroad and fraud. Three other staff members of the IKCDS who have been sentenced to two years' imprisonment are currently serving their sentences.

Amnesty International's report makes it clear that these charges are politically motivated.

The charge of dissemination of false information relates to statements by the IKCDS concerning irregularities observed during the 1995 parliamentary elections and discrimination against religious minorities. The charge of unauthorized funding has been selectively used against Ibrahim, whose case is the only instance known to Amnesty International in which restrictive regulations on funding have led to a conviction. As for the charge of fraud, Amnesty International's report notes that it is in contrast to the findings of the European Commission's monitoring process and to those of external audit reports.

In light of this, Amnesty International called on the Egyptian authorities to release Ibrahim and his colleagues Nadia Muhammad Ahmad 'Abd al-Nur, Khaled Ahmad Muhammad Fayadh and Ussama Hashim Hammad 'Ali immediately and unconditionally; to ensure that human rights defenders in Egypt can work freely without interference and harassment and to review legislation that stipulates prison sentences for the mere exercise of the right to freedom of expression and association.

\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>