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EGYPT: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS THE SENTENCING BY A MILITARY COURT OF EIGHT PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International is condemning the sentencing of eight prominent members of the Muslim Brothers and calling for the immediate release of seven of them sentenced last week to three years in prison.

“These men are prisoners of conscience , put behind bars for nothing more than belonging to an organization opposed to the government,” Amnesty International said.

Five other men were acquitted and another was given a one year suspended prison sentence in the trial which ended on 15 August.

The 13 were arrested at the beginning of April and in May President Hosni Mubarak issued a special decree referring this case to be tried by a military court. There is no right to appeal the verdict or sentence of a military court to a higher court. The trial started on 15 June and the defendants were charged with membership of an illegal organization (the Muslim Brothers) which “aims to overthrow the regime and the suspension of the constitution”. During trial sessions the prosecution did not provide any evidence to demonstrate that the defendants had committed any recognizably criminal offence.

The Muslim Brothers, although officially banned, were tolerated by the authorities until early 1995. Members of the organization are influential in professional associations, including the Bar Association and the Medical Syndicate. Over the last few years the Muslim Brothers have repeatedly condemned the use of violence by armed Islamist groups in Egypt.

The worldwide human rights organization has consistently urged the Egyptian Government to stop the trial of civilians before military courts. Trials before these courts violate some of the most fundamental requirements of international law, including Egypt’s solemn treaty commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

“Everyone charged has the right to be tried before a competent, independent and impartial court, the right to have adequate time to prepare a defence, the right to be defended by a lawyer of one’s choice and the right to appeal to a higher court,” Amnesty International said.

BACKGROUND

Mohammad Mahdi ‘Aqef, a 68-year-old former member of the People’s Assembly (parliament), Dr ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Ghazali, a 59-year-old lecturer at the Faculty of Economics - Cairo University, Mostafa Tahar al-Ghunaymi, a 40-year-old medical doctor working at Samannud Hospital, Mohammad Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Fattah Badawi, aged 59 and professor of Arabic, Dr Mahmoud ‘Omar al-‘Arini, a 72-year-old lecturer at the Faculty of Agriculture - University of al-Azhar, Mahmoud ‘Ali Abu-Riya, aged 74 and a publisher in al-Mansourah, Hassan Gawda ‘Abd al-Hafiz, a 67-year-old former member of the People’s Assembly and head of an Islamic charitable organization in Bani Sueif, were sentenced to three years’ imprisonment.

‘Abd al-Azim ‘Abd al-Magid al-Maghribi, a 68-year-old former member of the People’s Assembly, received a suspended sentence of one-year imprisonment.

Abu al-‘Ala Madhi Abu al-‘Ala, aged 34 and Deputy Secretary General of the Engineers’ Syndicate, Dr Issam Hashish, a 46-year-old lecturer of mechanical engineering at Cairo University, Magdi al-Faruq Anwar, a 39-year-old engineer, Dr Gamal ‘Abd al-Hadi, a lecturer in Islamic history at the University of al-Azhar and Dr Rashad Mohammad al-Bayoumi, a 61-year-old lecturer at the Faculty of Sciences - University of Cairo, were acquitted. The first three were reportedly arrested in connection with the newly formed al-Wasat Party which applied for legal status at the beginning of this year.

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