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Joint Statement by Seven Human Rights Organizations

EGYPT: Concerns about ongoing of detention of human rights defenders

Amnesty International (AI)

Article 19

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH)

Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a joint program of FIDH & OMCT)

World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)

In a statement today, seven international human rights organizations expressed their grave concern at the Egyptian State Security Prosecution's decision to extend the detention of Saad El-Din Ibrahim, Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center in Cairo, and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur, the finance director of the institution, for a further 15 days.

"Egypt's international obligations require it to respect the rights of detainees which include to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them", the organizations said today. "The charges brought against Saad El-Din Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur are so lacking in detail that they do not allow the defence to challenge the lawfulness of the detention order"

On 12 July and 13 July 2000, State Security Prosecution examined the charges against Saad El- Din Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur in separate sessions each lasting for several hours, and decided to renew the detention order.

The authorities failed to define these charges in relation to Egyptian law. Defence lawyers present at their first appearances before the State Security Prosecution on 1 July 2000 reported that charges focussed on several accusations, including receiving foreign funding without permission of the authorities, falsification of election documents and dissemination of false information harmful to Egypt.

Charges of receiving foreign funding without authorization are based on Military Decree No 4/1992 which carries a minimum of seven years' imprisonment. However, the prosecution has failed to indicate clearly and for all charges under what provisions of the Egyptian law they are being prosecuted.

In connection with the investigations against Saad al-Din Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur several other people have also been arrested and remain in detention. They include staff members of the Ibn Khaldun Center and Warda 'Ali Bahi, a staff member of Hay'at Da'am al-Nakhibat (Women Voters' Support Center), an NGO cooperating with the Ibn Khaldun Center.

The international human rights organizations called upon the Egyptian government:

- to disclose information on the factual and legal basis for the charges against Saad al-Din Ibrahim and Nadia 'Abd al-Nur and all the others detained in connection with the case

- to ensure that human rights defenders in Egypt can work in an environment without interference and harassment in accordance with the spirit of the UN Human Rights Defenders Declaration of 1998

Background

According to Article 14 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Egypt is a member state, a detained person shall be "informed promptly and in detail (...) of the nature and cause of the charge against him"

According to the Egyptian Criminal Procedure Code, the prosecution can decide to extend the pre-trial detention period to up to six months, the maximum period after which a decision has to be taken on whether to proceed to trial. The Egyptian authorities frequently detain alleged political opponents for extended periods of pre-trial detention, in violation of international law. Over the past few months dozens of alleged Muslim Brothers have been detained under broad charges, such as "membership of an illegal organization". In early July 2000 the total number of detained as alleged Muslim Brothers was reported to be more than 200.

Restrictive regulations on activities of NGOs have been used by the Egyptian authorities to harass and muzzle human rights defenders in Egypt. In February 2000 the Egyptian General Prosecution Office announced the referral to the (Emergency) Supreme State Security Court (ESSSC) of the case of Hafiz Abu Sa'ada, Secretary General of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights. He was charged with receiving funding without approval from the authorities, under a Military Decree No 4/1992 which carries a minimum of seven years imprisonment. Hafiz Abu Sa'ada, who was abroad when the referral was made public, subsequently received oral assurances from the authorities that his case would not be pursued and he returned to Egypt on 10 March 2000.

On 9 December 1998 the UN General Assembly adopted the "Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" -- commonly referred to as "Human Rights Defenders Declaration". Article 5 of the Declaration states: "For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels(..)"

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