

EXTERNAL

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Death Penalty- Imminent execution

18 May 1998

EGYPTMati Bassilous Mati Hanna

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On 14 May 1998, the court of Cassation upheld Mati Bassilous Mati Hanna's death sentence. As the *Mufti*, the highest religious authority in the country, has already approved the sentence, Mati Bassilous Mati Hanna's execution is now imminent.

Mati Bassilous Mati Hanna, a Coptic Christian, was charged with the murder of the female singer Widad Hamdi. A Cairo Criminal court originally sentenced him to death for this murder. Defence lawyers appealed against his death sentence before the court of Cassation. The court of Cassation ordered the retrial before another division of the Criminal court.

On 24 November 1997, the Criminal court sentenced him to death for the second time. Mati Bassilous Mati Hanna's defence lawyers appealed again before the court of Cassation. On 14 May 1998, the court of Cassation issued its ultimate decision. It affirmed that the murder was premeditated and upheld the death penalty.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The death penalty, which is applied in Egypt for criminal offences such as drug use or trafficking and murder, and for offences related to "terrorism", has been used extensively in the country in recent years. Since January 1998 alone, Amnesty International has recorded 22 death sentences passed by military, criminal and (Emergency) Supreme State Security courts and 19 executions. Furthermore, since October 1992, when President Hosni Mubarak began issuing special decrees referring civilians to be tried by military courts, 85 death sentences have been passed by such courts and 62 executions have been carried out.

Death sentences issued by criminal and (Emergency) Supreme State Security courts are submitted to the *Mufti* for approval. This is a routine measure, as he approves the vast majority of them. They are then passed on to the President of the Republic or his nominee for ratification. Final verdicts by criminal courts can be appealed against before the Court of Cassation only when it can be proved that there were procedural irregularities in the trial. Death sentences issued by military courts are subject to ratification by the President of the Republic, and then review by the Military Appeals Bureau, also headed by the President of the Republic.

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

- acknowledging the seriousness of the crime for which Mati Bassilous Mati Hanna was convicted, but explaining your opposition to the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life, pointing out that it has never been shown to have a unique deterrent effect, and is brutalizing to all involved in its application;
- urging the President to use his constitutional powers to grant clemency and commute this and all other pending death sentences;
- drawing attention to world trends to abolish or reduce the use of the death penalty, in accordance with Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is a state party.

#### APPEALS TO:

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His Excellency Mohammad Hosni Mubarak  
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
'Abedine Palace, Cairo, Egypt

**Telegrams: President Mubarak, Cairo, Egypt**

**Telexes: 93794 WAZRA UN**

**Faxes:+202 390 1998**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

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

Dr Fathi Sorour  
Speaker  
The People's Assembly  
Magles al-Sha'ab Street, Cairo, Egypt

and to diplomatic representatives of EGYPT accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.**