

EXTERNAL

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Prisoner of conscience/health concern

12 June 1997

EGYPT'Alaa Hamed, writer

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Amnesty International has learned that on 25 May 1997 a Cairo Appeal Court upheld a sentence of one year's imprisonment, a fine of 200 Egyptian pounds and the confiscation of his book *al-Firash* ('the Bed'), handed down on writer 'Alaa Hamid by the North Cairo Court of the First Instance in June 1992. He had been charged with producing and possessing, for trading purposes, printed materials of an indecent nature which encourage immorality.

'Alaa Hamed's lawyers have lodged an appeal against the sentence before the Court of Cassation. The court is expected to rule on 29 June 1997 on whether he should remain in prison or be released on bail during the appeal process.

'Alaa Hamid, who is being held in Isti'naf Prison, situated on the outskirts of Cairo, is reported to be in poor health. He is said to be suffering from severe stomach and kidney infections and has very low blood pressure.

Amnesty International considers 'Alaa Hamid to be a prisoner of conscience being held solely for the non-violent expression of his beliefs, and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Scores of individuals have been sentenced to prison terms and remain detained as prisoners of conscience in Egypt as a result of their peaceful opposition political activities, among them 53 alleged members of the *Muslim Brothers* organization sentenced in November 1995 to prison terms of up to five years' imprisonment with hard labour. The charges against them included "membership of a banned organization, plotting to change the present regime through the infiltration of vital institutions with a view to setting up an Islamic state and possession of anti-government literature. However, the real reason for their arrest, detention and subsequent conviction is believed to have been that some of them had been planning to stand as independent candidates in the parliamentary elections in November and December 1995.

Furthermore, a number of writers and intellectuals in Egypt perceived as holding non-Islamic views have been put at risk in recent years as a result of public statements issued by Islamist scholars at *al-Azhar*, a very influential religious institution in Cairo, accusing them of offending Islam through their writings. Such statements have been taken by members of armed Islamist groups in the country as a "green light" to issue death threats against them and label them as "apostates": well-known secularist intellectual and writer Dr Farag Foda was assassinated by members of armed Islamist group *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* on 9 June 1992, Nobel Prize-winning writer Naguib Mahfouz was attacked outside his home in October 1994, also by alleged members of an armed Islamist group, and on 21 June 1995, following a Cairo Court ruling that Dr Nasr Abu Zeid, a professor at Cairo University, should separate from his wife because he had allegedly insulted the Islamic faith through his writings, armed Islamist group *al-Gihad* (Holy War) issued a public statement calling for his death as an "apostate".

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

- expressing concern at the imprisonment of 'Alaa Hamid as a prisoner of conscience following the upholding on appeal of his 1992 prison sentence;
- urging his immediate and unconditional release;
- expressing concern at the ill-health of 'Alaa Hamid, and urging that he be allowed immediate access to the medical treatment he requires.

**APPEALS TO:**

General Hassan al-Alfy  
Minister of the Interior  
Ministry of the Interior  
Al-Sheikh Rihan Street  
Bab al-Louk, Cairo  
Egypt  
**Telex: 21361 MOICM UN**  
**Telegrams: Interior Minister, Cairo, Egypt**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Mr Ismail Sallam  
Minister of Health and Population  
Ministry of Health  
Maglis al-Sha'ab Street  
Cairo  
Egypt  
**Telex: 94107 MOHEG UN**  
**Telegrams: Health Minister, Cairo, Egypt**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Mr Raga' al-'Arabi  
Public Prosecutor  
Dar al-Qadha al-'Ali  
Ramses Street  
Cairo  
Egypt  
**Telegrams: Public Prosecutor, Cairo, Egypt**  
**Salutation: Dear Prosecutor**

General Nabil Sayyam  
Director of Prisons  
Maslahat al-Sugun  
Al-Gala'a Street  
Cairo, Egypt  
**Telegrams: Director of Prisons, Cairo, Egypt**  
**Salutation: Dear Director**

**COPIES TO:**

Ms Nayla Gabr  
The Human Rights Department  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo, Egypt  
**Faxes: (20 2) 574 9667**

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.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 July 1997.