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### **Egypt: Concern over arrest and detention of possible prisoners of conscience**

Amnesty International has written to the Egyptian government to express its concern over the arrest and detention, earlier this month, of 20 Egyptian professionals for their alleged affiliation with the banned Muslim Brothers organization.

The 20 men, the majority of whom hold leading positions in professional bodies, have reportedly been detained on the charge of joining an illegal organization.

“If, as we believe, the detainees are being held solely on the grounds of their alleged affiliation with the Muslim Brothers -- an organization that neither advocates nor condones violence -- we regard them as prisoners of conscience and call for their immediate and unconditional release,” Amnesty International said.

Mukhtar Nouh, a lawyer and former member of the Egyptian parliament, is among those detained. He, along with several other detainees, is also a member of the Egyptian Bar Association. The body is scheduled to hold its board elections soon, after the recent lifting of a three-year government ban on its activities.

The men were arrested on 14 and 15 October this year and ordered by the State Security Prosecution to remain in detention for 15 days. On 26 October, during a hearing attended by an Amnesty International delegate, the 20 detainees were ordered by the State Security Prosecution to remain in so-called "preventive detention" for a further 15 days.

According to some reports, their cases were referred to a military court on 27 October, but there have been conflicting accounts regarding this development and no official confirmation has been forthcoming. However, if these civilians are tried by a military court, such a trial would violate fundamental requirements of international law, in particular the right to be tried before independent and competent judges.

Some of the detainees have been tried in the past by military tribunals. One of them, Muhammad Sa'd 'Alawiyya al-Sayyid Taha, was among 60 people sentenced and imprisoned by the Supreme Military Court for their alleged affiliation with the Muslim Brothers, after unfair trials in 1995 and 1996. Others were detained for several months on similar charges and later released without trial.

Amnesty International is also concerned that dozens of other alleged members of Muslim Brothers continue to be held in so-called "preventive detention". People can be held in "preventive detention" for up to six months under the Egyptian Criminal Procedure Code.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on

+ 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>