

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Egypt: Release prisoner of conscience Ashraf Ibrahim**

On the eve of the opening of the trial of five civil society activists, including prisoner of conscience Ashraf Ibrahim, an active member of the anti-war movement in Egypt, Amnesty International calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

"The trial of these five men is a pretext to punish them for criticizing government policies," Amnesty International said. "Everyone should have the right to express their views peacefully without fear of arrest, trial and imprisonment."

The five men - four of whom are currently at liberty and being sought by the police - are charged in connection with their alleged affiliation with an illegal organization, named in the indictment as the *Revolutionary Socialists*. Ashraf Ibrahim, an engineer, is also charged with possessing printed materials for distribution relating to the *Revolutionary Socialists* and with harming Egypt's reputation, specifically by providing information to international human rights organizations.

The four other men are: Nasser Faruq al-Buhairi, a researcher at the non-governmental organization *the Land Center for Human Rights*; Yahya Fikri Amin, an engineer; Mustapha Muhammad al-Basyuni, unemployed; and Rimun Edward Guindi, a student. All five men are members of the *Egyptian People's Committee for Solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada* and the *Egyptian Movement against the War*.

Their trial opens tomorrow before the (Emergency) Supreme State Security Court, which denies defendants the right to an appeal before a higher court, in violation of international standards for fair trial. They could face prison sentences of between five and 15 years if found guilty.

Ashraf Ibrahim was arrested on 19 April 2003 in connection with his activities campaigning against the war in Iraq. Hundreds of people associated with the anti-war movement, including lawyers, journalists, parliamentarians, academics and students, were detained in the first half of 2003. The majority were detained for their participation in unauthorized demonstrations. Some were held for several weeks in administrative detention under emergency legislation. Many alleged that they were tortured or ill-treated, particularly during the initial period of detention when held incommunicado at the State Security Investigations Department.

"This case is part of a wider clampdown on civil society activists and those who publicly criticize or oppose the government's policies," Amnesty International said. "Egypt must repeal or review legislation which violates international human rights standards and which stipulates prison sentences for the mere exercise of freedom of expression."

Emergency legislation imposes serious restrictions on the rights of freedom of expression and assembly as guaranteed under international human rights law and standards, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is a state party. In February 2003, the Egyptian Parliament approved the extension of the state of emergency for a further three years.

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