

Egypt: Prisoner of Conscience

On 25 May 1997 a Court of Appeal in Cairo upheld a one-year prison sentence on 'Ala' Hamed, a 61-year-old writer. The confiscation of copies of his novel, *al-Firash* (The Bed), was also ordered. He was convicted of having produced and possessed for trade "printed materials of an indecent nature which encourage immorality". AI considers that his conviction on these charges is an unjustified restriction on his right to freedom of expression. If imprisoned he would be a prisoner of conscience.

'Ala' Hamed had initially been tried and sentenced in June 1992 by a Court of First Instance. He appealed against the sentence and remained free while the appeal was being examined. His novel was reportedly never distributed. He was imprisoned immediately following the Court of Appeal's verdict in May 1997. 'Ala' Hamed's lawyers have lodged an appeal with the Court of Cassation. On 3 August, he and his lawyers appeared before an appeal court to petition judges to suspend the sentence pending a final ruling by the Court of Cassation. Although the court accepted the petition and he was subsequently released, there are fears that he may be rearrested as a prisoner of conscience should the Court of Cassation decide that there were no procedural irregularities during his trial.

Please write, expressing concern that 'Ala' Hamed was imprisoned as a prisoner of conscience for more than two months in 1997, and urging that the case against him be quashed, to: President Mohammad Hosni Mubarak/ President of the Republic/ 'Abedine Palace/ Cairo/ Egypt.

Bosnia-Herzegovina: police fail to protect returnees

Between 1 and 3 August 1997 Bosnian Croat residents rioted against several hundred Bosniacs (Bosnian Muslims) who had recently returned to their homes in villages near Jajce in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The mobs reportedly attacked the returnees and several houses were set ablaze. One Bosniac returnee, Hazim Sahman, was later found dead in his house, which had been set on fire. Police not only failed to intervene to protect the Bosniacs from the mobs, but some police officers were reportedly involved in the attacks. Subsequently, all the Bosniac returnees were forcibly expelled, fled or were evacuated from the area.

Although Jajce had a mixed population before the war, the town is now almost exclusively inhabited by Bosnian Croats, some of whom are displaced persons from other parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Unless all the authorities live up to their responsibility to respect the human rights of all citizens, it will not be safe for many of the millions of refugees and displaced persons from Bosnia-Herzegovina to exercise their right to return to their homes in safety, as outlined in the General Framework Peace Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Returning refugees to areas which are not their original homes will breach that guarantee and reinforce the division of the country, thereby increasing the obstacles to returns in the longer term.

Please write, urging investigation into the death of Hazim Sahman and the forcible expulsion of Bosniacs from villages near Jajce, to: Vladimir Soljic / President of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina / Musala 9 / 71000 Sarajevo/ Bosnia-Herzegovina. If your country hosts refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, please send a copy of your letter to your own authorities, and urge them not to return refugees to Bosnia-Herzegovina until the human rights conditions in that country have substantially and durably improved and there is no risk of serious human rights abuses against returnees.

NIGERIA: Prisoners of conscience

Retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigerian Head of State from 1976 to 1979, and retired Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, his deputy, were sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment and to death respectively after secret treason trials in 1995. These sentences were later reduced to 15 and 25 years' imprisonment respectively.

AI considers the real reason for their imprisonment to be their continued calls for the current military government to return the country swiftly to civilian rule.

General Obasanjo and Major-General Yar'Adua were arrested in March 1995, and were among 43 prisoners convicted of treason and related offences after secret and grossly unfair trials by a military tribunal. All were eventually sentenced to between 15 years' and life imprisonment, with no right of appeal. The statement used to convict General Obasanjo and Major-General Yar'Adua was later retracted on the grounds that it had been made under duress.

General Obasanjo was the only military head of state in Nigeria to have voluntarily handed power over to an elected civilian government. He has become well known for his work for peace, good governance and accountability; his attempts to rally non-violent opposition were seen as a major threat by the government. Major-General Yar'Adua was also a leading opponent of continued military rule as a delegate to a National Constitutional Conference in December 1994, where he pressed for a hand-over to civilian rule.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Olusegun Obasanjo and Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, to: General Sani Abacha/ Chairman/ Provisional Ruling Council/ State House/ Abuja/ Federal Capital Territory/ Nigeria.