

AI Index: PRE 01/171/2011  
31 March 2011

## **Egypt urged to scrap draft law outlawing protests and strikes**

The Egyptian authorities should scrap a draft law aimed at criminalizing strikes and protests, Amnesty International said ahead of demonstrations against the law set for Friday.

"Any move to curb freedom of assembly and the right to strike in Egypt would be an alarming step backwards and an insult to those who risked - and lost - their lives calling for change over the past two months," said Amnesty International.

"It is vital in this transitional period that the Egyptian authorities guarantee basic human rights such as the right to carry out peaceful protests and strikes."

Activists are set to gather in Tahrir Square on Friday to demand that Egypt's interim military government scrap the proposed ban and push through human rights reforms.

The Egyptian cabinet last week proposed the new law, which would make participating in protests and strikes that "hinder the work of public institutions or authorities during a state of emergency" illegal.

Under the proposed law, protesters and anyone deemed to be inciting protest could face jail or a hefty fine.

"Linking this repressive law to the state of emergency only serves to highlight the urgent need for the state of emergency to be lifted immediately," said Amnesty International.

"Instead of undoing the progress made towards reforming the shortcomings of Egypt's Constitution, the authorities must heed calls to investigate army abuses, release political prisoners and end the use of military trials to try protesters."

A number of peaceful protesters have been arrested by the army in recent weeks, with many also reportedly tortured and tried before military courts.

Following the resignation of former president Hosni Mubarak last month, workers and others have continued to stage demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins to protest against the rising cost of living and to demand better wages and working conditions.

The Egyptian cabinet has said banning strikes and protests is necessary for the protection of Egypt's security and economy.

"By restricting workers' rights to strike and protest, the Egyptian authorities are not only breaching their obligations to uphold the right to freedom of assembly and the right to strike, they are breaking their promises to improve the living conditions of Egyptians," said Amnesty International.

"Using the protection of national security and economy as a pretext to silence Egyptians was the hallmark

of the last 30 years. The Egyptian authorities should protect the right to protest and strike but instead they are entrenching repressive measures, all too well known to Egyptians.”

## **Background**

The proposed law violates Egyptians’ right to freedom of assembly and the right to strike guaranteed under international law. Egypt is party to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which guarantee these rights in Article 21 and Article 8 respectively.

In the past, the right to strike has been effectively limited by Egyptian law and is subject to approval by a two-thirds majority by the general union’s executive committee, and further ratification by the Egyptian Trade Union Federation which enjoyed a virtual total monopoly on trade union activities and maintained close ties to Egyptian authorities.

Egypt's state of emergency has been in place since 1981 and was most recently renewed by ex-President Hosni Mubarak in May 2010.