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Egypt must drop charges against blogger accused of ‘defaming’ military on Twitter

The Egyptian authorities must immediately drop charges against a woman blogger and activist accused of defaming the military on Twitter, Amnesty International said today.

Asmaa Mahfouz, 26, was summoned by military prosecutors on Sunday and later released on a bail of 20,000 Egyptian pounds (\$3,356) after posting messages on the social media network expressing concerns about the Egyptian justice system and the actions of the military government, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

“Asmaa Mahfouz is facing a military trial merely for posting comments which criticize the Egyptian military justice system and do not at all appear to represent a call to violence,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s Director for Middle East and North Africa.

“The Egyptian authorities’ decision to refer Asmaa Mahfouz to a military court seems intended to send a message to those critical of the authorities that dissent will not be tolerated. The charges against her must be dropped immediately,” he said.

“Trying civilians before a military court is also deeply problematic: these courts are fundamentally unfair and deprive defendants of some of the basic guarantees of fair trial, including the right to appeal,” he added.

She is charged with “insulting the armed forces” and “inciting the use of violence” on her Twitter posts.

No date has been set yet for the trial.

She is a founding member of the 6 April Youth Movement, one of the main organising forces behind the mass uprising in Egypt earlier this year.

Asmaa Mahfouz wrote on Twitter:

“If the justice system does not give us our rights, nobody should be upset if armed groups emerge and carry out assassinations.

As long as there is no law there is no justice, anything can happen and nobody should be upset”

She denies the allegations and following her release, reportedly told the Egyptian website Al-Masry Al-Youm: “I was only warning the military council that the absence of justice will lead to chaos.”

The SCAF has said that 10,000 civilians have been tried by military courts since Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down as president earlier this year.

Amnesty International considers such trials, which were much used against his critics by former President Mubarak, to violate fundamental requirements of due process and fair trial, and opposes the trial of civilians by military courts.