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Egypt: Policing powers for military ‘dangerous precedent’

A new law issued by Egypt’s President Mohamed Morsi giving military officers policing powers is a dangerous loophole which may well lead to the military trial of civilians, Amnesty International warned

A decree issued on 9 December states all military officers will have the right to exercise judicial powers until the results of a referendum on a draft constitution are announced. That vote is due to be held on 15 December.

“Considering the track record of the army while they were in charge, with more than 120 protesters killed and in excess of 12,000 civilians unfairly tried before military courts, this sets a dangerous precedent,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International.

In addition, a new law to “protect the revolution”, which allows prosecutors to detain people for up to six months in preventive detention without trial while they are investigated for press and media offences, organizing protests, striking and “thuggery”, has not been repealed.

“Such restrictive provisions have been routinely used to punish peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association,” said Hadj Sahraoui.

“Under this decree reminiscent of the decried emergency law, people may be held for six months on spurious charges before they are finally brought to trial.”