

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 12/07/98

UA 29/98 Fear of torture / Prisoners of Conscience / Legal concern

29 January 1998

EGYPT Ibrahim Khalil al-Za'farani, a medical doctor, aged 46
Mohammad Taha Wahdan, university lecturer, aged 31

The two above-named men were reportedly rearrested on 22 January 1998 within hours of returning home after their release from serving three-year prison terms. Their current whereabouts are unknown and there are fears that they may be subjected to torture while held in secret incommunicado detention. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience.

Ibrahim Khalil al-Za'farani, Secretary General of the Alexandria branch of the Egyptian Medical Syndicate and head of its human rights committee, was allegedly summoned, on the day of his release, by an officer of the State Security Investigations Department (SSI) to the headquarters of the SSI branch in Alexandria. He was detained there until 26 January and then transferred to Cairo.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ibrahim Khalil al-Za'farani and Mohammad Taha Wahdan were arrested in January 1995, together with 28 other alleged members of the Muslim Brothers Organization. Subsequent arrests of other members of the organization took place in July and October that year. All were tried by a military court in November 1995, according to the remit of a presidential decree, and charged with plotting against the government to establish an Islamic state. The real reason for their arrests, however, is likely to be connected with their campaign to participate in the November 1995 legislative elections. Three Amnesty International delegates attended sessions of the trial and were able to meet with a number of the defendants, their defence lawyers and members of the court, including the President. The defendants had not used nor advocated the use of violence. Amnesty International campaigned for their unconditional release.

Torture of political prisoners continues to be systematic, particularly in the headquarters of the State Security Investigations Department (SSI) in Lazoghly Square, Cairo, but also in other SSI branches in the country, police stations and occasionally prisons. The most common torture methods reported are: electric shocks, beatings, suspension by the wrists or ankles, burning with cigarettes, and various forms of psychological torture, including death threats and threats of rape or sexual abuse of the detainee or their female relatives. Lawyers and local human rights groups have lodged hundreds of complaints of torture with the Public Prosecutor's Office, but no impartial investigations are known to have been conducted.

In May 1996 the United Nations Committee against Torture issued a report summarizing the results of a confidential inquiry carried out since 1991 over a period of five years. It concluded that *"torture is systematically practised by the Security Forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence"*.

The Committee urged the Egyptian Government to *"make particular efforts to prevent its security forces from acting as a State within a State, for they seem to escape control by superior authorities"*. The Egyptian Government has so far failed to implement any of the recommendations made by the Committee.

Among those recommendations were the need to *"set up an independent investigation machinery, including in its composition judges, lawyers and*

medical doctors, that should efficiently examine all the allegations of torture, in order to bring them expeditiously before the courts. This independent group should also monitor the safeguards against torture guaranteed to persons deprived of their liberty under Egyptian law, in particular by having access to all the places where allegations of torture have been reported...."

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Arabic, French, English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Ibrahim Khalil al -Za' farani and Mohammad Taha Wahdan were arrested only hours after their release from prison on 22 January 1998 having served three-year prison terms and urging their immediate and unconditional release;
- seeking assurances that they are being humanely treated;
- urging that they be given immediate access to a lawyer of their own choosing, to their families and to medical care if required.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency General Habib al-'Adeli
 Minister of the Interior
 Ministry of the Interior
 Al-Sheikh Rihan Street, Bab al-Louk, Cairo, Egypt
Telegrams: Minister Habib al-'Adeli, Cairo, Egypt
Telexes: 21361 MOICM UN
Faxes: + 202 355 7792
Salutation: Dear Minister

His Excellency Faruq Sayf al-Nasr
 Minister of Justice
 Ministry of Justice
 Midan Lazoghly, Cairo, Egypt
Telegrams: Minister Sayf al-Nasr, Cairo, Egypt
Faxes: + 202 355 8103
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Ms Nayla Gabr
 The Human Rights Department
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 Corniche al-Nil, Cairo, Egypt

Mr Raga' al-'Arabi
 Public Prosecutor
 Dar al-Qadha al-'Ali
 Ramses Street, Cairo, Egypt

and to diplomatic representatives of Egypt accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 March 1998.