

AI INDEX: MDE 12/17/99
To be released on 26 April 1999

OPEN LETTER TO THE EGYPTIAN AUTHORITIES

DEATH OF EGYPTIAN LAWYER : TIME FOR TRUTH

Five years ago, on 26 April 1994, 32-year old lawyer Abd al Harith Madani was arrested by security forces at his office in Cairo, and died the following day in detention.

Although the Egyptian authorities have so far failed to explain the reasons of his death, Egyptian and international human rights organizations -- including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch -- have reasons to believe that Abd al-Harith Madani died of injuries sustained under torture. Despite the secrecy of the authorities, some of the autopsy findings have been leaked suggesting that Abd al-Harith Madani had been severely tortured in detention.

Five years after the death of Abd al-Harith Madani, the Egyptian authorities appear to be trying to prevent the truth to emerge. His family was only informed more than a week after the lawyer's death, indicating an attempt to cover up right from the beginning. During the days after the incident the Egyptian authorities made contradictory statements, but kept silent on the case for the last years. Amnesty International is calling on the Egyptian authorities to make public the results of the investigation of Abd al-Harith Madani's death without any further delay.

One week before the UN Committee against Torture is due to examine Egypt's periodic report, Amnesty International reminds the Egyptian authorities of their obligation to investigate cases of torture thoroughly and bring perpetrators to justice. In May 1996 the UN Committee, which monitors compliance with the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, issued a report summarizing the processes of a confidential inquiry carried out since November 1991 and concluded that "torture is systematically practised by the Security Forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence..."

Since May 1994, hundreds of letters have been sent by Amnesty International members, calling for a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation to be carried out, for the findings to be made public and for the

perpetrators to be brought to justice. The last reply from the Egyptian authorities was received in 1995.

Pierre Sané
Secretary General
Amnesty International