

URGENT ACTION

EGYPTIAN ARRESTED FOR CRITICAL INTERNET POSTS

On 13 September 2012 Alber Saber Ayad was arrested at his home in Cairo, Egypt, accused of “defamation of religion” and “spreading false news” in relation to internet posts he made which criticised religion. He has been reportedly ill-treated while in detention. He is a prisoner of conscience arrested solely for his exercising his right to freedom of expression.

On 12 September angry groups of men surrounded **Alber Saber Ayad’s** house in eastern Cairo, where he lives with his mother and sister, calling for his death and accusing him of heresy and atheism. They believed Alber Saber Ayad, a 27-year-old computer science graduate, had promoted a film reportedly made in the US which satirized Islam and the Prophet which many found offensive. His mother called the police for protection but when they eventually arrived the following day they arrested Alber Saber Ayad and took him to El Marg police station and confiscated his personal computer and CDs.

Alber Saber Ayad told his lawyers that while in detention, a police officer in El Marg Prison incited other detainees to attack him. The detainees beat Alber Saber Ayad and cut him with a razor blade along his neck. He was then taken to another room where he was again beaten by 20 prisoners and forced to remain standing throughout the night. His lawyers fear for his safety in prison and outside when he is released. They also fear for the safety of his mother and sister who have been threatened and forced to leave their home which continues to be surrounded by angry mobs.

Alber Saber Ayad has been charged with contempt of religion because of internet posts and videos in which he describes his views and criticism of religion. These were found while he was in detention. He was initially detained for four days but on 16 September his detention was renewed by the Public Prosecutor for another 15 days. His lawyers challenged this renewal which was rejected although they have managed to have him transferred to another prison for his safety His next court session has been postponed until 17 October.

Please write immediately in English, Arabic or your own language:

- Urging the Egyptian authorities to release Alber Saber Ayad’s immediately and unconditionally as Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to ensure Alber Saber Ayad and his family are protected from further harassment and threats;
- Calling on them to open a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into Alber Saber Ayad’s treatment in detention and to bring those found responsible to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 NOVEMBER 2012 TO:

Minister of Interior

Ahmed Gamal El Din

Ministry of Interior

El Sheikh Rihan St

Cairo,

Egypt

Fax: +202 2795 9494

Salutation: Your Excellency

Prosecutor General

Counsellor Abd El-Megeed Mahmoud

Dar al-Qadha al-'Ali

Ramses Street

Cairo

Egypt

Fax: +202 2 577 4716

Salutation: Dear Counsellor

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Alber Saber Ayad has been charged with defamation of Islam and Christianity, insulting the divine and satirizing religious rituals and sanctities and the prophets under articles 98, 160 and 161 of the Egyptian Penal Code. The charges carry a punishment of up to 6 years imprisonment and a fine of 500 Egyptian Pounds (82 US dollars). He has also been charged of "spreading false news" under Article 102 of the Penal Code.

There have also been other recent cases involving blasphemy charges and which Amnesty International is still investigating. These include the case of a Shia man accused of desecrating a mosque and charges of defaming Christianity reportedly brought against two Muslim men for burning the Bible. There are also reports that a six year sentence of a Christian man accused of posting pictures on the internet which were deemed offensive to Islam.

The charges against Alber Saber Ayad are reminiscent of practices under former president Hosni Mubarak to limit freedom of expression. Karim Amer, a blogger, was sentenced to four years in prison in 2007 for criticizing then president Mubarak and Egypt's al-Azhar religious authorities in his blog. One of his charges for which he was convicted was "inciting strife and defaming Muslims on the internet by describing the Prophet of Islam and his comrades as murdered, which disturbs national peace. In November 2008, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) declared Karim Amer's detention "arbitrary" on the grounds that it violates freedoms guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and that he should be released.

Film clips purportedly made by a US-based anti-Islam propagandist were translated into Arabic and posted on the Internet under the title of "Innocence of Muslims". They depict the prophet Muhammad and other figures revered by Muslims in an insulting manner and have deeply offended many Muslims. The clips have been cited as the reason for a series of protests in several Muslim countries in front of embassies and other places associated with the USA and other Western states. Some of these protests have been violent and have resulted in deaths and injuries to protesters and members of the security forces.

International human rights law protects expression of ideas that are offensive. Criticism of religions and other beliefs and ideas is a vital component of the right to freedom of expression. And laws -- such as blasphemy laws -- that criminalize criticism of (or insult to) religious beliefs violate freedom of expression. Such criticism, insult or mockery does not interfere with the individual believer's freedom of religion, however offensive they may find it.

Name: Alber Saber Ayad
Gender m/f: Male

UA: 278/12 Index: MDE 12/030/2012 Issue Date: 28 September 2012