

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 12/39/97

3 July 1997

Further information on UA 183/97 (MDE 12/36/97, 19 June 1997) and follow-up (MDE 12/37/97, 24 June) - Prisoners of conscience / Fear of further POCs / Fear of torture

EGYPT Hamdein Sabbahi, journalist

Mohammad 'Abdu, veterinarian

Mohammad Sulayman Fayyad, lawyer

Hamdi Haykal, lawyer

and new arrests: at least 250 farmers

At least 250 farmers are reported to have been arrested in Egypt in recent days in connection with continuing protests against a new agricultural law - Law 96 of 1992. In view of the reported torture of four men arrested earlier (named above, see original UA and previous update), there are fears that the farmers may be facing torture and ill-treatment in custody.

At least 150 farmers were reportedly arrested in the village of al-'Attaf in al-Mahalla al-Kubra, north of Cairo, on 2 July, after some of them allegedly set fire to the building of the Agricultural Association (a local office of the Ministry of Agriculture) and to warehouses in the village in protest against the Law 96.

In Upper Egypt, 95 farmers were said to have been given a 15-day detention order each by the prosecutions of Mattay and Samalut, two towns in the Minya governorate. They were arrested on 1 July and allegedly accused of perpetrating acts of violence, organizing public protests and disrupting transport.

The current whereabouts of the detained farmers are not known to Amnesty International.

Law 96, which will be implemented in October 1997, raises agricultural rents and permits landowners to evict farmers. It abolishes the provisions of the 1952 agrarian reform law which guaranteed security to farmers on rented land.

FURTHER BACKGROUND

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the Egyptian Government to eradicate the use of torture, and to set up prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture. In May 1996 the United Nations Committee against Torture issued a report summarizing the processes of a confidential inquiry carried out since 1991. It concluded that "torture is systematically practised by the Security Forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence" and 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 Committee also urged the Government to set up a "thorough investigation into the conduct of the police forces in order to establish the truth or otherwise of the many allegations of acts of torture, bring the persons responsible for those acts before the courts and issue and transmit to the police specific and clear instructions designed to prohibit any act of torture in the future."

Please continue action on behalf of Hamdein Sabbahi, Mohammad 'Abdu, Mohammad Sulayman Fayyad and Hamdi Haykal as outlined in previous update. In addition

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

- seeking assurances that all those farmers detained in late June, early July, will be protected from any form of torture and ill-treatment and that they will have access to their lawyers, families and medical care;
- seeking information regarding their legal status and their current whereabouts;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of any detainee who did not use or advocate violence in their protests against Law 96, and for any others to be promptly charged with recognizably criminal offences.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Mohammad Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
'Abedine Palace, Cairo, Egypt
Telegrams: President Mubarak, Cairo, Egypt
Telexes: 93794 WAZRA UN
Salutation: Your Excellency

General Hassan al-Alfy
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Al-Sheikh Rihan Street
Bab al-Louk, Cairo
Egypt
Telex: 21361 MOICM UN
Fax: +202 355 7792
Telegrams: Interior Minister, Cairo, Egypt
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Ms Nayla Gabr
The Human Rights Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo, Egypt
Faxes: +202 574 9808

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

Dr Fathi Sorour
Speaker
The People's Assembly
Magles al-Sha'ab 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 13 August 1997.