

PUBLIC

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Human rights defender / Prisoner of  
conscience

2 December 1998

**EGYPT**Hafez Abu Sa'ada, Secretary General of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights

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Hafez Abu Sa'ada, a lawyer and leading human rights defender, was arrested because of his human rights work on 1 December 1998 and ordered by the courts to be detained for 15 days.

Amnesty International believes this is a move by the authorities to hamper the work of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), of which Hafez Abu Sa'ada is Secretary General. This would also prevent him attending a Human Rights Defenders' Conference in Paris next week in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As Hafez Abu Sa'ada has been arrested because of his human rights work Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience. He is currently detained at Istiqbal Tora Prison, south of Cairo. If tried and convicted he could face between seven and fifteen years imprisonment with hard labour.

Hafez Abu Sa'ada was arrested after he appeared as a witness in a court-hearing about EOHR financing. He is accused of "accepting funds from a foreign country with the aim of fulfilling acts that would harm Egypt, receiving donations without obtaining permission from the competent authorities [and of] disseminating false information abroad that would harm the country's national interests". Amnesty International believes his arrest is a result of recent high-profile campaigns by the EOHR.

In August and September this year the EOHR published two reports. The first, about deaths in custody in Egyptian prisons, resulted in Hafez Abu Sa'ada being briefly detained.

The second concerned at least 20 torture cases of Coptic Christians in the village of al-Kushh, Upper Egypt, during an investigation by the security forces into the murder of two Coptic Christians in August. In its report, EOHR denounced the random arrests and torture. EOHR also emphasised the increasing use of torture by the security forces in criminal cases against both Muslims and Christians.

In October an English newspaper published a highly emotive and factually questionable article concerning the events in al-Kushh village, resulting in a public outcry in Egypt. This culminated in an article by the weekly Egyptian newspaper, *al-Usbu'*, accusing EOHR of treason and linking a donation of \$25,000 by the British Embassy to EOHR, to the article in the English newspaper.

Human rights organizations in Egypt have received funds from foreign institutions and governments for many years. The Egyptian authorities are aware of such funding arrangements and no organization has so far been prosecuted for receiving funds from abroad.

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

- expressing concern at the arrest of Hafez Abu Sa'ada on 1 December 1998 and urging that he be immediately and unconditionally released as a prisoner of conscience;
- seeking assurances that while in detention he be treated humanely, in accordance with international standards for the treatment of detainees, and that he be given immediate access to his family and lawyers;
- calling on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that all human rights defenders in the country are allowed to work and campaign freely;
- reminding the government of Egypt of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 19: "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression".

**APPEALS TO:**

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 5700**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Ms Nayla Gabr

The Human Rights Department

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Corniche al-Nil, Cairo, Egypt

**Faxes: + 202 574 9533**

Mr Raga' al-'Arabi

Public Prosecutor

Dar al-Qadha al-'Ali

Ramses Street, Cairo, Egypt

**Faxes: + 202 574 0881**

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 12 January 1999.

**"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression"**  
*Article 9 , Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

Visit the Amnesty International UDHR campaign website on <http://www.amnesty.excite.com>