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## **Lebanon: Amnesty international condemns harassment of human rights defender**

*Condemning the arraignment before a military court of Kamal al-Batal, Director of the Lebanese human rights organization Mirsad, Amnesty International said that "the charging of Kamal al-Batal seems to be an attempt to harass and intimidate a human rights defender to prevent him from carrying out his work".*

*Kamal al-Batal was first summoned by the police for interrogation in July 2000 concerning a call for urgent action Mirsad had issued by e-mail in April 2000. The communique expressed concern about a raid by the Lebanese vice squad on an internet service provider "Destination" and the interrogation of its General Manager, Ziad Mugarby, about a gay Lebanese web site. Ziad Mugarby was not charged with any offence.*

*On 5 August, two weeks after Kamal al-Batal's interrogation, the military prosecutor brought charges against him and Ziad Mugarby under Article 157 of the Military Penal Code, which provides for a penalty of between three months and three years to anyone who defames the Lebanese army and Lebanese flag. The precise charge against Kamal al-Batal is that he "tarnished the reputation of the vice squad by issuing a printed flier".*

*The 13 April statement by Mirsad stated that it "deplores the blatant and unlawful attempts by the police to interfere in the freedom of the Internet as well as the freedom of expression of the gay community" and expressed concern that the raid might be the start of a wider censorship campaign.*

*"The reaction of the authorities to this statement is unacceptable", Amnesty International said. "If military courts are to be used in this way to silence free criticism, it will be a sad day for freedom of expression in Lebanon".*

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