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## **Egypt: President must go beyond decree and carry out greater human rights reform**

A general amnesty decree by Egypt's President Morsi pardoning those detained or tried for taking part in protests since the January 2011 uprising is welcome news, Amnesty International said, but falls short of providing a fair trial to 1100 other civilians imprisoned after unfair trials before military courts.

"Equality before the law means that all Egyptians have the right to a fair trial regardless of the nature of the accusations," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International

"Military courts cannot be used to try any civilians and those imprisoned after military trials must be referred for re-trial before the ordinary judiciary or released."

The general amnesty decree, which cleared all those detained or on trial before civilian or military courts for "supporting the revolution" mainly in protests in the period from 25 January 2011 to when he took office on 30 of June 2012, was announced on 8 October, marking 100 days of Morsi's presidency.

Beneficiaries of the general amnesty would include protesters put on trial before criminal courts in relation to protest violence near Tahrir square in November 2011, the Cabinet Offices protests in December 2011, as well as protesters tried in military courts after the Abbaseya protests near the Ministry of Defence in May 2012.

However, the right to fair trial remains flouted for some 1,100 civilians, according to the last official figures, who were convicted after being unfairly tried before military courts for criminal offences unconnected to the uprising such as murder, rape, theft, embezzlement, use of force using weapons.

Some 12,000 civilians were tried before military courts since the uprising till August 2011, according to official figures, while an unknown number of civilians received military trials until June 2012. They were tried on charges such as "thuggery", possession of weapons, damaging property and "violating the curfew" among other offences.

The list of those benefiting from the general amnesty is set to be published by the Public Prosecutor and the Military Prosecution within a month of the decision and is expected to include people convicted, under investigation, or on trial (except on charges of murder).

President Morsi had earlier established a committee to examine cases of civilians tried unfairly before military courts and has previously ordered the release of more than 700 civilians imprisoned by such tribunals.

The general amnesty decree followed one of the recommendations of the committee presented to the President in its final report submitted in September 2012.

“Amnesty International urges the President to ensure that any civilian tried by a military court, who is not the subject of the latest pardon, is now either referred to trial before a civilian court, or else released,” added Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

“Besides the legacy of military trials of civilians and in order to ensure the measures are not piecemeal, Amnesty International urges the President to now set out a comprehensive plan for human rights reform detailing the steps the authorities will take to combat impunity and respond to Egyptians’ demands for human rights, dignity and social justice.

“The organization also urges President Morsi to take action to press for accountability as a key step to undoing the legacy of abuse left by the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (the SCAF) and of Hosni Mubarak.”

Although President Morsi has appointed a committee to investigate the killings of protesters during the uprising and the rule of the SCAF, in practice so far, security forces continue to have almost total impunity for human rights violations they committed.

Amnesty International considers combating impunity to be an essential requirement for putting Egypt on the path to human rights.

Military tribunals have reportedly only convicted three soldiers of “manslaughter” of protesters in relation to the Maspero protests when dozens of Coptic protesters were killed a year ago under the rule of the SCAF.

Currently, only one member of the riot police is being tried over the deaths and injury of protesters. Other members of the security forces received relatively light sentences for killings of protesters in the uprising.

The three decades of human rights violations under Hosni Mubarak remain completely unaddressed.

Accountability was a key message of [a memorandum addressed by the organization to the President-elect on 29 June](#), which called on him to prioritize human rights in his first 100 days.

It was also the subject of [two Amnesty International reports](#) released on 2 October.