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BACKGROUND

Egypt has been under a State of Emergency since the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat in 1981¹ and the bleak picture of its human rights record is widely blamed on the emergency legislation provisions which have permitted arbitrary detention, facilitated systematic torture and provided for executive approval of courts' decisions. Thousands of members and suspected members of illegal Islamist groups have been detained without charge or trial, some for more than seven years, and torture has been used systematically against detainees. Moreover, since the end of 1992 when President Hosni Mubarak started issuing special decrees referring civilians for trial by military courts whose procedures are grossly unfair, 74 people have been sentenced to death by these courts and 54 executions have been carried out. Armed Islamist groups, whose confrontation with the security forces has since 1992 claimed the lives of more than 1,000 people from both sides, have also been responsible for grave human rights abuses. Scores of civilians, including Coptic Christians, tourists and a well-known writer², have been deliberately killed by these groups, particularly al-Gama'a al-Islamiya (Islamic Group) and al-Gihad (Holy Struggle)³.

Amnesty International, Egyptian human rights groups and other international human rights organizations have over the years published numerous reports documenting human rights violations in Egypt and have made detailed recommendations to the Egyptian Government to take concrete steps to remedy the situation, but these recommendations have been ignored⁴. On the contrary, the Egyptian Minister of the Interior has accused local and international human rights groups of "lying and conducting a psychological war against the country's police"⁵ adding that "Egypt is one of the countries that respects human rights and does not approve of torture"⁶.

Against this backdrop, dozens of women have been subjected to human rights violations, although their plight has seldom been publicized. They have been victims of arbitrary detention and torture, usually solely by reason of their marital or other family relationships. Members of the security forces, especially the State Security Investigations Department (SSI), have often taken wives and female relatives of Islamist activists effectively as hostages, especially in Upper Egypt, when they did not find the men wanted for arrest. They released these hostages usually after the person sought has given himself up to the

¹On 22 February 1997 the People's Assembly (Parliament) approved a presidential decree to extend the State of Emergency for another three years.

²Farag Foda was killed in June 1992 and al-Gama'a al-Islamiya claimed responsibility for his killing.

³Several senior government officials, including the President of the Republic himself, have been the targets of attempted assassination by these groups over the last few years.

⁴For more information on human rights violations in the country see for example Amnesty International's reports entitled *Egypt: Indefinite detention and systematic torture: the forgotten victims* (AI Index: MDE 12/13/96, published in 1996); *Egypt: Military trials of civilians: a catalogue of human rights violations* (AI Index: MDE 12/16/93, published in 1993) and *Egypt: Ten years of torture* (AI Index: MDE 12/18/91, published in 1991).

⁵AFP, 15 December 1996.

⁶Ibid.

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police. Some wives of imprisoned Islamist leaders are repeatedly harassed by the security forces. They are routinely visited by SSI officers and their homes searched without warrant. In some cases they are arbitrarily arrested, taken to an SSI building and ill-treated. They are also pressurized to divorce their husbands who are arbitrarily detained or who are serving prison-terms, and to inform on other Islamist women. They are being punished for the activities of their husbands.

This short report focuses on some cases of women who have been subjected to human rights violations, including a woman who was reportedly tortured on two occasions, another who has been administratively detained for over two years and a woman who “disappeared” reportedly after having been arrested by security forces. Amnesty International has raised these cases with the Egyptian authorities but has received no substantive response.

By highlighting these cases Amnesty International calls on the Egyptian Government to ensure that necessary measures are taken to prevent these violations, which risk developing into a widespread pattern, and draws the government’s attention to its obligations under international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ratified by Egypt in 1982 and 1986 respectively. Egypt also participated in drafting the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in which governments reaffirmed their commitment to international human rights instruments safeguarding the rights of women, including the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women⁷.

The report does not attempt to cover other serious human rights abuses that women in Egypt are subjected to, including inequalities before the law, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, harassment by Islamist groups of non-Islamist women and so forth. For example Law 26/1975 on Egyptian Nationality bars foreign husbands and children of Egyptian women from acquiring Egyptian nationality. Egyptian women are also required to have their husbands’ or fathers’ permission to travel abroad. Recently the Mufti al-Shaikh Nasr Farid Wassel, the highest religious authority in the country, stated that women should not seek senior government posts because that “would be against nature”, adding that “if a woman asked for a high-ranking position in government, she would be acting against nature because such jobs demand firmness while a woman’s nature is characterised by clemency and tenderness”⁸. His comments infuriated many women and men alike. Dozens of girls have died in Egypt after or while undergoing genital mutilation. Condemnation by local and international human rights groups led the Minister of Health in July 1996 to issue a decree banning the practice in all hospitals, clinics and medical centres of the health ministry⁹. An increasing number of women, especially in Upper Egypt, have been pressurized by Islamist men to wear the Hijab (the veil).

⁷The Egyptian delegation at the conference registered its reservation concerning the paragraphs on inheritance rights in the Platform for Action, particularly paragraph 274 (d) which calls for equal rights for succession. The delegation stated that this would be “against the background of complete respect for the laws of inheritance in the Islamic Shari‘a”. It also insisted that all provisions on sexual and reproductive rights be interpreted within the context of the “marital bond” or the family as the “basic unit of society”.

⁸AFP 22 January 1997

⁹This however has not stopped doctors from performing the circumcision privately. For example in mid-October 1996 two young girls, Amira Mahmoud Mohammad, aged four, and Warda Hussain al-Sayyid, aged three, bled to death in Armant, a small town in Upper Egypt, after a government doctor tried to circumcise them at their homes.

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Women's groups in Egypt have been campaigning for respect of women's rights and for equality before the law. Several women's human rights groups focussing mainly on women's issues have been set up in recent years. For example, Dr Susan Fayad runs the El Nadim Centre for the Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, founded in Cairo in 1993, it helps women, men and children who are victims of torture, including rape, domestic violence and child battering. Dr 'Aida Saif al-Dawla heads the New Woman Research Centre, which deals with violence against women, rape and other women's issues. 'Azza Sulayman, a lawyer and previously working at the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, has now set up a centre that provides legal aid and general human rights education to women in popular Cairo districts.

Amnesty International acknowledges the extent and gravity of a wide range of abuses against women such as domestic violence, genital mutilation and other violent acts committed by individuals and organizations who are not direct agents of the state. Amnesty International also acknowledges the important work by individuals and other organizations against such abuses. However, Amnesty International's mandate for action is focused mainly on abuses perpetrated directly by governments and armed political groups. This report highlights some cases where women's basic human rights have been violated while in the custody of the state's security forces.

AMAL FAROUQ MOHAMMAD AL-MAAS

Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas, a 28-year-old housewife, married with three children, was arrested and detained twice in 1993 and 1996 and was reportedly tortured on both occasions.

In the early hours of 26 April 1993 three officers from the State Security Investigations Department (SSI) went to her house in Oussim district, near Imbaba in Cairo, reportedly broke down the door and stormed into her home. They searched it and allegedly took some money. Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas and her husband, Ahmad Mohammad Ahmad al-Sayyid, were reportedly beaten up before he was arrested and taken away. One of the three officers gave her his name and asked her to go to the SSI branch at Gaber bin Hayyan Street at 8 pm, the same day. She told Amnesty International what happened next:

“... when I went there and stated at the reception that I had an appointment with the said officer I was initially told by security men at the reception that there was no one by that name. Then someone took me upstairs to a small room where I recognized the man who had come to the house. He introduced me to another officer by mentioning his name. The two officers started interrogating me about my husband, his friends and his activities.... They asked me whether my husband was hiding any arms and explosives in the house and I replied in the negative. The officer, who had come to the house, then started threatening me and asked me to take off my clothes and that if I refused he would undress me by force. I had to take off my clothes and was left just in my underwear and sitting on a stool. They tied my hands up to a bar, fixed high between two walls, and I was left suspended. My feet were also tied. The two officers then started beating me repeatedly, one with a rubber hose and the other with a stick on different parts of the body, including the back, arms and thighs. They brought a pen and a piece of paper and asked me to state that when they came to the house they found weapons and explosives which my husband was hiding and that he had been behaving abnormally in the past two months. When I refused they blindfolded me and took me to another room and while walking I could hear the sound of my husband screaming from another room. Once inside the room a man there, whose voice was different from the previous ones,

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started threatening me with rape unless I said what they wanted me to say. He pulled me by the hair and violently pushed me onto a chair. He then started beating me fiercely with his fists. I said that I would write and sign anything they wanted me to say... I signed those papers... Then they took me outside the building and let me go...”.

Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas was released on the night of 27 April 1993. Her forced confession was reportedly used against her husband, who was tried by a military court in May 1993 in connection with the attempted assassination of the Minister of Information and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment¹⁰. He is held in the High Security Prison in Tora, where visits by lawyers and families have been banned by the Ministry of the Interior since December 1993¹¹.

Following her release, Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas filed, through her lawyer, a complaint with the Prosecution of al-Doqqi district in Cairo. The Director of the Prosecution Office interviewed her at length on 4 May 1993 and referred her to a forensic medical doctor. The forensic medical report issued on 8 May 1993 stated that the bruises seen on the left upper arm and the back were “caused by beating with a solid object”. The report concluded that the injuries were consistent with the period of time when she claimed to have been tortured.

On 2 September 1993 the Director of the Prosecution Office of al-Doqqi sent a summons to the two SSI officers whom Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas had identified as being responsible for her torture, to come to the Prosecution building for investigation on 10 September 1993. On that date, however, the two officers failed to appear. A second summons was sent on 10 September 1993 to the two officers to appear on 30 September 1993 but again they failed to go. Between September 1993 and the end of December 1995 at least 56 summonses were sent to the two officers but they failed to present themselves. On 13 January 1996 one of the officers went to the Prosecution Office and was questioned in connection with his role in the alleged torture of Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas. When he was asked about his name he gave a name that Amal had mentioned and he said he was a major in the SSI at the Gaber bin Hayyan Street branch. Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas was not invited to attend that meeting. When the officer was asked specific questions about the complaint that Amal had made regarding her torture and whether he was one of the officers responsible, he denied all the accusations. When he was asked about where he was from 24 April to 27 April 1993 he stated he was on a secret mission outside Cairo. On 14 January 1996 the Director of the Prosecution Office received a communication from the headquarters of the SSI stating that X [the officer who was interviewed] was on a secret mission outside Cairo from 10 April 1993 until 20 May 1993. One day later, on 15 January, he received another communication from the SSI saying that the register of visiting people at the SSI in Gaber bin Hayyan Street had been checked and that there was no one by the name of Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas having been received in the building in the period of 26-28 April 1993.

¹⁰The attempted assassination of the Minister of Information Safwat al-Sharif, took place on 20 April 1993. Fourteen people were tried by the Supreme Military Court in connection with the attempted assassination. On 27 May 1993 the Court sentenced six people to death, including one *in absentia*. Three others received sentences of up to life imprisonment with hard labour, two were acquitted and charges against three others were dropped.

¹¹Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas and lawyers reportedly asked the Supreme Military Court to drop the charges against her husband since the evidence against him was based on a confession extracted following torture, but the court reportedly turned down the request.
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Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas's ordeal did not stop there. On 1 July 1996, late in the afternoon, she was arrested at her mother's home by SSI officers and taken to the SSI branch in al-Marsa district, near Shubra in Cairo. She told Amnesty International:

"...they took me to al-Marsa where I was held for 10 days...once I arrived in the building they put a blindfold on my eyes. They took it off when they put me in a room. The room was so small, very dark and very dirty... then at around 2 am they took me upstairs and started interrogating me. They said they wanted the weapons which they said my husband was hiding. I said I knew nothing about these weapons.... they tortured me severely during those 10 days. They slashed my arms, back and thighs and legs with a sharp knife while I was just in my underwear. They also used electric shocks on different parts of my body. On one occasion I was left suspended from just one arm for about two hours.... They asked me how I knew the names of the officers whom I identified in my complaint to the Prosecution... after 10 days I fainted because of the torture. They brought a doctor who after examining me said to them that I should be released otherwise I would die there. They took me out to the street and left me there. Some passers-by helped me by stopping a taxi and asking the taxi driver to take me to my mother's home.... My mother told me that while I was detained some SSI officers went to her house and said to her they wanted to take my son Mohammad, aged 6, because his mother wanted to see him. They never asked me whether I wanted to see my son or not. But my mother, who had already left my sons with relatives, told them my sons were not there and that she had no idea where they were..."

Her mother filed, through the same lawyer, a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office (complaint no. 10549) on 11 July 1996 regarding Amal's detention and torture. In the early hours of 22 July 1996 Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas was arrested again. SSI officers stormed her mother's house, beat up the 67-year-old mother and subsequently took Amal to the SSI building in al-Marsa. She was reportedly tortured again and methods of torture included the use of electric shocks on different parts of her body. She was allegedly pressurized to work as an informant for the SSI branch and also to withdraw the complaint she made following her torture in 1993. She was threatened that if she complained again to the Prosecution Office she would be arrested and detained for a long time. She was released early the following morning. Following her release Amal tried to file a complaint with the Director of al-Sahel Prosecution, but the latter reportedly refused to accept the complaint. On 25 July her lawyer lodged a complaint (no.11205) with the Public Prosecutor's Office urging that his client be referred for forensic medical examination. The complaint was ignored. On 31 July 1996 Amal and her lawyer went to the North Cairo Prosecution in al-Abbassia and tried to file a complaint there. But this complaint was refused and they were told that she should lodge a complaint with al-Sahel Prosecution, the one that had already refused to accept Amal's complaint.

9dddPdd@dddPdd@9On 31 July 1996 Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas went to al-Nadim Centre for the Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo. A report issued by the Centre noted that scars visible on the thighs, the back of the knee, around the right armpit, just above the navel and around the ankles, were consistent with the methods of torture the victim had described. The report also noted that the victim was "suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, acute anxiety and reactive depression". These, according to the report, were the result of the various methods of torture, including the threat of rape, that she had been subjected to. She was then referred by the Centre to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society Hospital, also in Cairo, where

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she received treatment from 31 July until 5 August 1996.

Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas's case is representative of several other women's cases in Egypt. Amnesty International has received occasional reports of women being subjected to torture in recent years, but most of the victims reportedly do not lodge an official complaint or even talk about it to lawyers and local human rights groups for fear of reprisal. Nevertheless a few women, including Amal al-Maas, did complain and did talk to lawyers and human rights activists. A 17-year-old student, Hana 'Ali Farrag, who was arrested at her home in Minya in July 1990 and interrogated about the whereabouts of her brother, Sayyid, who was wanted by the authorities told Amnesty International:

"They took me to the police station and put me in a room. Three of them asked me where my brother was hiding. It must have been around midnight and I kept telling them I didn't know where he was. The head of the State Security Intelligence told the others to suspend me and they obeyed. I was swinging upside-down from a bar under my knees and they hit the soles of my feet with a thick wooden stick, and kept repeating the same questions 'did you take him food? Did you go and see him? Where is he hiding?' Afterwards we submitted a formal complaint of my detention and treatment, but it has never been investigated. My brother Sayyid was not wanted in connection with any offence, it was just the usual detention."

Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas's alleged torture in July 1996 took place amid the Egyptian Government's consistent denial that torture was systematically used against political prisoners. The United Nations Committee against Torture had issued in May 1996 a report summarizing the processes of a confidential inquiry conducted since November 1991 and concluded that "torture is systematically practised by the Security Forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence.... no legal action [has] been brought against members of State Security Intelligence since the entry into force of the Convention [UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment] for Egypt in June 1987". 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".

Amnesty International had not in the past received reports of women being threatened with rape while in detention. On the basis of Amal Farouq Mohammad al-Maas's allegations the organization is now urging the Egyptian Government to publicly emphasize that rape and sexual abuse, including threats of such treatment, by government agents are grave and intolerable human rights violations. SSI officers, policemen and prison personnel must be explicitly informed that anyone who commits such human rights violations will be promptly brought to justice. Rape and sexual abuse are forms of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and thus prohibited under international law. Sexual abuse is not limited to physical assault, but includes rape threats, fondling and the deliberate use of body searches or sexually-explicit language to degrade or humiliate the detainee or prisoner.

GIHAN IBRAHIM 'ABD AL-HAMID

Gihan Ibrahim 'Abd al-Hamid, aged 27 married without children, has been held without charge or trial since 7 November 1994. She was interrogated in connection with her contacts with another woman, Sabah 'Abd al-Rahman, the wife of an Islamist activist said to have been killed by the security forces in a
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shoot-out in November 1994. Gihan Ibrahim 'Abd al-Hamid, whose husband is currently serving a 15-year prison term in connection with the assassination of the well-known writer Farag Foda in June 1992, is being held in al-Qanater al-Khairiya Prison (women's section). She has been issued with at least six release orders from State Security Courts, but instead of being released she was transferred to the headquarters of the SSI in Lazoghly Square, sometimes for up to six weeks, issued with a new detention order and then returned to the prison again¹². For example, on 4 August 1996 a State Security Court ordered her release, but she was taken to the Lazoghly Square headquarters and kept there until 22 September 1996 when she was returned to al-Qanater al-Khairiya Prison with a new detention order. In the meantime while she was in Lazoghly her father went to visit her in prison and was told she was not there and was given no indication as to her whereabouts.

On 21 October 1996 Amnesty International wrote to the Egyptian Minister of the Interior seeking information as to Gihan Ibrahim 'Abd al-Hamid's legal situation and urging that she be immediately and unconditionally released if she was not to be charged with any recognizably criminal offence. As of the end of February 1997 no response had been received directly from the authorities. However, in their responses to appeals sent by Amnesty International members, the Egyptian Embassies in Berne (Switzerland) and Oslo (Norway) stated on 30 December 1996 and 13 January 1997, respectively, that Gihan Ibrahim 'Abd al-Hamid "is a member of a terrorist organization and she is also the wife of one of the leaders of this organization. Her husband is currently imprisoned on charges of terrorism". The responses also noted that "Mrs Abd al-Hamid is charged with hiding a terrorist in her home while he was on the escape, and hiding the weapons used for the murder crimes he committed. In addition, she transmitted messages from imprisoned terrorists to other terrorists, ordering them to commit acts of terrorism. Consequently, Mrs Abd al-Hamid has been detained in prison as a dangerous criminal". Other women arrested in connection with the same case include, **Sabah 'Abd al-Rahman, Amal Sayyid 'Abd al-**

'Aziz, Hoda Bashir, Mona Sayyid 'Abd al-'Aziz, Inshirah al-Gindi, and a sixth person known only by her first name **Halima**. They were reportedly arrested in Cairo at the end of 1994 and accused of membership of an illegal Islamist organization. They were held in al-Qanater al-Khairiya for about six months before their release.

Gihan Ibrahim 'Abd al-Hamid remains the longest serving female administrative detainee in Egypt. Usually when women are arrested by reason of their family relationships, they are detained for short periods of time and then released. They are interrogated about the whereabouts of their husbands, if the

¹²Under Article 3 of the Emergency Law the Minister of the Interior may "arrest and detain suspected persons or those who endanger public order or security." Anyone detained under this article may petition against detention after 30 days have elapsed from the date on which the detention order was issued. These petitions are referred to the (Emergency) Supreme State Security Court, which has to give a reasoned decision within 15 days of presentation of the petition after hearing the detainee's testimony. If the court decides to release the detainee the Minister of the Interior may challenge this decision within 15 days. If the Minister objects to the decision the matter is referred to another equivalent court within 15 days of the Minister's objection, and this court must issue its decision within 15 days of the referral. If the second court orders release, this decision has to be given effect. If the court orders continued detention, the detainee is entitled to submit a fresh petition after 30 days have elapsed. This policy is flawed in reality. When a second court orders a release, detainees are not released, they are simply transferred to local police stations, the Headquarters of the SSI or SSI branches elsewhere in the country for a few days before they are issued with new detention orders and taken back to prison.

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latter are wanted by the security forces and have evaded arrest, their possible contacts with other Islamist women, the possibility of their being members or suspected members of illegal Islamist groups, or the activities of their jailed husbands before their arrest, even if the husband has been detained for a number of years. For example, a 30-year-old woman married with three children, and who does not wish to be named for fear of reprisals told Amnesty International that she was arrested at her home in the early hours of 21 August 1995 and detained for five days. A large number of security officers went to the house in a Cairo district and took her and her four-year-old son to the Lazoghly Square headquarters. When they arrived there she was put in a large room in the basement of the SSI headquarters. She stated that she heard men screaming. She was suffering from respiratory problems and she started shouting for help. A medical doctor was brought to examine her there. He recommended that she be released. Her child was taken to her family after three days of detention but she was kept there for five days.

She was interrogated in connection with her husband's trips abroad. Her husband was arrested in 1981 and imprisoned for three years, then in 1986 and in 1987 during which he was reportedly tortured. In 1989 they both went to Saudi Arabia and then to Afghanistan¹³ before returning to Egypt in 1991. In April 1991 he was arrested whilst preparing to go to Saudi Arabia. His wife did not know his whereabouts for six months and has now not seen him for over two years. He has been held without charge or trial in Istiqbal Tora Prison where family visits as well as access to lawyers have been banned since September 1994. Most of the questions she was asked in the SSI headquarters revolved around her trip to Afghanistan, such as why she went there, whom she met and whether she met any Egyptians there. She was released on 26 August 1995. One night in February 1996 more than a dozen of security officers went to her house again. They searched the house for about one hour before they left.

Women have been detained without charge or trial for peaceful protests. On 24 March 1995 Warda Mahmoud and Nawwara Nagm, students at Cairo University and 'Ain Shams University, respectively, were among dozens of people arrested after they had peacefully protested against Israel's participation in the International Trade Fair being held in Cairo. The two women were held at al-Qanater al-Khairiya Prison until 3 April 1995, when they were released without charge.

MARWA AL-SAYYID METWALLI HAFEZ

Marwa al-Sayyid Metwalli Hafez, aged 18, "disappeared" on 18 August 1996. She reportedly left the family home in al-Marg district of Cairo on the morning of 18 August 1996 to go shopping and never returned. She was said to have gone to a bakery, bought some bread but did not have the exact change. The owner of the bakery who knew her said to her she could pay him later. Neither he nor the parents saw her again. Her parents contacted relatives, friends and neighbours seeking information as to her whereabouts, but to no avail. Her father was told by some neighbours that they had seen SSI officers rounding up people in the area during that morning. He then went to the SSI branch in Abu Za'abal and asked SSI officers if she was detained there. He was told she was not there but was in turn asked questions about her, including which mosque she prayed in and why she was wearing *al-Niqab* (a veil that

¹³Hundreds of Islamist men from the Middle East went voluntarily to Afghanistan in the 1980s and fought alongside Afghan armed Islamist groups against the Afghan Government forces and Soviet soldiers. When the Afghan war ended some Arab Islamists went back to their countries and have reportedly been involved in armed activities against their governments. Others have remained in Afghanistan or until recently in Pakistan.

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completely covers the face and head). He was told “maybe she had married an Islamist or maybe she had been abducted by Islamists”.

The family received several reports suggesting that Marwa al-Sayyid Metwalli Hafez had been arrested and detained. Some of these reports were particularly detailed in their description of her which led the family to believe that she was indeed in custody. A former detainee held in the SSI branch in al-Madha, north of Cairo, claimed to have seen her there. However, when one of her relatives went to the SSI building in al-Madha to enquire about her he was told she was not there. A local security officer was reported to have stated that the girl was detained and that she would be released once the person they were looking for had been arrested. The family had also received reports that their daughter was arrested and detained because she had been distributing leaflets in the local mosque. In early January 1997 the family received reports that their daughter had been seen in al-

Qanater al-Khairiya Prison. Her father and her uncle went to the prison on 15 January 1997. Once they arrived there they were asked at the reception whom they wanted to visit. They wrote down the name of their daughter and handed it in to the woman guard. After checking the name with the names of prisoners on the prison register the guard told the father and the uncle that they could go inside to see their daughter. The woman they saw however was not their daughter. She had almost the same name. When they said that she was not their daughter they were asked to leave immediately. On 22 January 1997 six members of the family were reportedly summoned to the SSI building in Abu Za’abal and were questioned separately about Marwa. One member of the family was allegedly ill-treated during questioning. The father had reportedly been summoned to the Prisons’ Directorate building in Cairo on two occasions and interrogated in connection with his daughter. He was also asked whether he knew anyone outside the country because the officials at the Prisons’ Directorate have been receiving appeals from Amnesty International members worldwide about the reported “disappearance” of Marwa al-Sayyid Metwalli Hafez. As of the end of February 1997 all the attempts made by the family to locate their daughter had failed and intimidation and harassment of the family was still continuing.

On 11 December 1996 Amnesty International wrote to the Egyptian Minister of the Interior seeking information regarding her current whereabouts and her legal situation if she had been detained. But as of the end of February 1997 no response from the Egyptian authorities had been received. The Egyptian Government has a responsibility to shed light on the whereabouts of Marwa al-Sayyid Metwalli Hafez.

Amnesty International is not aware of any other cases of women victims of “disappearances” in Egypt, though there have been some cases of men who have “disappeared” following arrest or detention¹⁴.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International has over the years made detailed recommendations to the Egyptian authorities but none of these recommendations have been implemented. No legislative or practical measures have been introduced to bring the country’s law or human rights practice into conformity with international human rights treaties. The organization is urging the Egyptian authorities to ensure that the human rights violations against the women mentioned in this report will not develop into a widespread pattern.

¹⁴For example, Mostafa Mohammad ‘Abd al-Hamid ‘Othman, a 28-year-old student from Qina in Upper Egypt, “disappeared” following his arrest in Zagazig on 17 December 1989 and to date his fate remains unknown.

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Amnesty International is therefore calling on the government to:

- immediately release all those who are at present in detention under the Emergency Law for whom release orders have been issued by the courts;
- introduce immediate and effective measures to ensure that female detainees are protected from all forms of torture and ill-treatment, including sexual abuse and harassment;
- publicly emphasize that torture and ill-treatment, including threats of rape and sexual abuse, by government agents are grave and intolerable human rights violations and that anyone who commits such violations will be promptly brought to justice;
- ensure that statements or confessions extracted from detainees as a result of torture or ill-treatment -- including rape and sexual abuse or threats of such treatment-- must never be admitted in legal proceedings against them;
- set up prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all reports of torture and make the methods and findings of these investigations public within reasonable time;
- provide fair and adequate compensation and rehabilitation for all victims of torture;
- ensure that any members of the security or other forces implicated in torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including female detainees, be brought to justice;
- ensure that female staff should be present at all times during interrogation of female detainees and prisoners and should be solely responsible for any body searches which should not be carried out in any manner that constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.
- ensure that individuals are able to lodge official complaints on human rights violations and to contact national or international human rights groups without fear of reprisal, harassment or intimidation.