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## **Egypt: Another blow to freedom of expression**

The sentencing of 15 alleged Muslim Brothers by the Egyptian Supreme Military Court is a further blow to freedom of expression in Egypt, Amnesty International said today.

The 15 people include lawyers, physicians, university professors and engineers who have been detained since 1999. They were sentenced between three and five years imprisonment for their non-violent political activities on 19 November 2000.

“Amnesty International condemns the verdict, considers the 15 men to be prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release,” the organization said.

“This trial before a military court fell short of international standards for fair trial. Amnesty International has consistently urged the Egyptian authorities to put an end to the trial of civilians before military courts, which violates some of the most fundamental requirements of international law, such as the right to be tried before an independent and impartial court, and the right to appeal to a higher court,” the organization said.

The verdict had been postponed on several occasions in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 14 November 2000 and was eventually pronounced a few days after they had taken place. Over recent months hundreds of supporters and candidates of the opposition have been harassed and arrested in connection with the elections.

Delegates of Amnesty International observed two sessions of the trial in March 2000. They were denied access to the court room for the pronouncement of the verdict on 19 November 2000, despite official requests to attend.

The three men sentenced to five years' imprisonment are: Muhammad Badi'a 'Abd al-Magid, a university professor; Sa'ad Zaghlul al-'Ashmawi Muhammad Sabir al-'Ashmawi, a physician; and Ahmad Ibrahim Ahmad al-Halawani, a teacher. Mukhtar Nouh, the former treasurer of the Egyptian Bar Association, and former member of the parliament, was among the 12 sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Five other alleged Muslim Brothers were acquitted in the same trial.

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**For more information please refer to Amnesty International's report, *Egypt: Muzzling Civil Society* (AI Index: MDE 12/21/00), published on 19 September 2000. You can call Amnesty International delegates, in Egypt until 24 November 2000, on their mobile telephone number +44 7768 898908 or telephone Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566. You can also visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>**