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Egypt urged to drop charges of defamation against activist as repression intensifies

Amnesty International has urged the Egyptian authorities to drop the charges of defamation brought against leading human rights activists on account of their peaceful exercise of freedom of expression.

Amnesty International made this call ahead of a trial session involving three human rights activists tomorrow and the separate trial of a fourth on Sunday. These prosecutions are part of stepped up efforts by the Egyptian authorities to silence their critics and those who expose human rights abuses.

On Saturday the Khalifa court in Cairo will continue hearing the case against three men charged with "defamation", "the use of threats" and "misuse of communication tools", after allegations of extortion were made by a judge in 2007.

Amnesty International is sending a delegate to observe the proceedings of this trial.

Gamal Eid, Director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) and Ahmed Seif El-Islam Hamad, founder of the Hisham Mubarak Law Center (HMLC) both are due to appear before the Khalifa Court of Misdemeanour on Saturday.

Egyptian blogger Amr Gharbeia, now an Amnesty International staff member, will not be in court but will be represented by his lawyers.

On Sunday the Misr al-Qadima court in Cairo will continue to examine a defamation case brought by a judge who is a vice president of the State Council against Nasser Amin, Director General of the Arab Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and Legal Profession (ACIJLP).

Nasser Amin is being tried on account of statements made on the *Al-Dostor* newspaper and published in their weekly edition on 3 March 2010 in reaction to the vote by the General Assembly of the State Council against the appointment of women as State Council judges. This, he described as contrary to Egypt's Constitution and obligations under international human rights law.

These trials occur against the backdrop of increased attempts by the authorities to further curb freedom of expression, association and assembly as well as to bar people from demanding accountability by the security forces for human rights violations.

Fifty-five protestors were arrested in Cairo on 20 June following anti-torture demonstrations as hundreds of activists took to the street to demand that the police officers responsible for the death of 28-year old Khaled Mohammed Said in Alexandria be held to account.

Five others who were arrested following similar protests in Alexandria were charged with unauthorised public gathering and use of violence against the security forces. They were released on bail pending trial.

The security forces have reportedly used excessive force during the demonstrations and some protestors said they were beaten, tortured and sexually abused during their short detention.

Demonstrations took place today in Alexandria to protest recent news by the Public Prosecutor stating that the second autopsy of the body of Khaled Mohammed Said confirmed the initial report and that he died because asphyxiation after he swallowed a bag of drugs.

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