

23 February 1999

EXTRA 26/99

Fear of refoulement / Fear of torture

ALBANIA/EGYPT

Abd al-Mu'min Na'im
Muhammad Naguib Yassin

Albanian police in Tirana arrested the two men named above on 15 February 1999. Amnesty International fears that they will be forcibly returned to Egypt where they would be at risk of torture.

Initial Albanian press reports suggested that the men were suspected of planning an attack on the United States Embassy in Tirana and would be investigated and tried in Albania. However, the international Arabic press has reported that the Egyptian government has asked for them to be deported to Egypt, where they are at high risk of torture.

The Albanian authorities returned at least 14 men to Egypt in 1998 - see EXTRA 56/98, (EUR 11/01/98, 14 August 1998) and update (EUR 11/01/99, 27 January 1999). Eight of them are now in a group of 107 men charged in the so-called "Returnees from Albania" trial, which opened before the Heikstep Military Court, near Cairo, on 1 February 1999. Sixty-three of the defendants are being tried *in absentia*. During the second hearing on 4 February, 13 of the defendants alleged that they had been tortured. Ahmad Ibrahim al-Sayyid al-Naggar, forcibly returned from Albania in August 1998 (see EXTRA 53/98 (MDE 12/42/98, 4 August 1998) and update, MDE 12/52/98, 12 November 1998), and sentenced to death *in absentia* in a previous trial, withdrew his confession, alleging that it had been extracted under torture while he was in incommunicado detention at the State Security Investigations (SSI) Department in Lazoghly Square (Cairo).

It is unclear under what legislation the Albanian authorities deported the Egyptians in 1998, but Amnesty International fears that they have not been offered the opportunity to contest the deportation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture of political prisoners in Egypt is systematic, particularly at the SSI headquarters in Lazoghly Square, but also at other SSI branches, police stations and occasionally prisons. The most common methods reported are: electric shocks, beatings, suspension by the wrists or ankles, burning with cigarettes, and various forms of psychological torture, including death threats and threats of rape or sexual abuse of the detainee or their female relatives. Despite hundreds of complaints of torture reported by lawyers and local human rights groups to the Public Prosecutor's Office, no impartial investigations are known to have been conducted.

In May 1996, the United Nations Committee against Torture issued a report summarising the results of a confidential inquiry carried out between 1991 and 1996. It concluded that "torture is systematically practised by the Security Forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence" and went on to urge the 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".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/e-mails/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- asking the Albanian Government to explain the grounds for the arrest of Abd al-Mu'min Na'im and Muhammad Naguib Yassin in Tirana on 15 February 1999;
- calling on the Albanian authorities not to return them to Egypt, where they would be at risk of torture;
- urging the Albanian Government to confirm whether the men have been charged with any criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:(If voice answers when sending a fax, please ask to send a fax.)

President of Albania

Rexhep Mejdani

Presidenti i Republikës së Shqipërisë

Zyra e Presidencës, Tirana, Republic of Albania

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Salutation: Dear President

Prime Minister

Prime Minister Majko, Tirana, Albania

Kryetari i Këshillit të Ministrave, Tirana, Republic of Albania

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Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Paskal Milo

Ministri i Punëve të Jashtme

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Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Internal Order

Petro Koçi

Ministri i Rendit Publik

Ministria e Rendit Publik,

Tirana

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Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Thimio Kondi

Ministri i Drejtësisë

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Salutation: Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of Albania accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 April 1999.