

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Egypt: New anti-terror law must not entrench systematic human rights abuses**

Cairo – The Egyptian authorities have been committing systematic abuses of human rights in the name of national security, Amnesty International said in a new report published today. During a press conference held in Cairo, the organization urged the government to ensure the planned anti-terrorism law does not entrench these human right abuses.

The report, *Systematic abuses in the name of security*, follows an earlier warning by the organization last month that current constitutional changes and a planned new anti-terrorism law could further threaten human rights.

“Thousands of Egyptians have been locked up in the name of security; some have been held without charge or trial for years, often despite court orders for their release, while others have been sentenced after grossly unfair trials,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme. “The Egyptian government has a duty to protect the public and combat terrorism, but when doing so it must abide by basic human rights standards and its obligations under international law – and this, too often, it has failed signally to do.”

The report describes arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention without trial, torture and other ill-treatment by security officials, particularly the State Security Investigations (SSI) services, who have wide powers under the state of emergency that the government has maintained almost continuously for the past 40 years. It also condemns the use of special emergency and military courts to try civilians accused of security offences, and says their proceedings are unfair. Some of those tried by such courts have been sentenced to death and executed.

According to the report, Egypt has also been a key destination in the US-led global “war on terror”. Many Egyptian nationals suspected of terrorism have been transferred from abroad by the US, European and Arab governments despite the risk of torture, and have then been detained and tortured. The fate of some, who were victims of unlawful “renditions” by the USA, remains unknown. Their identities have never been disclosed, nor why they are being held or where.

“The Egyptian authorities must come clean and disclose the number, names, nationality and current whereabouts of all terrorism suspects extradited, subjected to “rendition” or otherwise transferred into their custody from abroad,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

The report lists six key recommendations for action by the government to break the cycle of abuses, including an end to incommunicado and secret detention and for all torture allegations to be promptly and properly investigated.

“Torture is widely used by the SSI officers and other security and law enforcement bodies but allegations are rarely investigated and when they are, very little results,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui. “The government must lift the shroud of impunity that protects those who torture in the name of the state.”

It is essential for the Egyptian government to allow the UN human rights experts on torture and on countering terrorism immediate access at a time when it is preparing new anti-terrorism legislation. Such visits would be a clear indication of the government’s commitment to uphold its international human rights obligations.

Amnesty International repeats its concern that the latest amendments to the Constitution and the forthcoming introduction of a new anti-terrorism law could pave the way for further abuses. Although no draft has yet been made public, in preparing its new anti-terrorism law the Egyptian authorities said they have looked at similar legislation in a number of countries, including the USA.

“It would be a gross error for Egypt to model its new anti-terrorism law on the US Patriot Act,” said Curt Goering, Senior Deputy Executive Director of Amnesty International USA. “The Patriot Act is reviled by many in the USA as a fundamental attack on long cherished freedoms because of the cavalier manner in which it sacrificed human rights and the rule of law in the name of security.”

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After 11.00GMT 11 April 2007, a copy of the report, *Egypt: Systematic abuses in the name of security*, will be available at:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde120012007>

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