

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 12/031/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 176
14 September 2007

Egypt: Freedom of expression under attack

The recent sentences handed down by an Egyptian court on 13 September against four editors are part of a concerted campaign by the authorities to stifle criticism and reflect the urgent need for a revision of the country's controversial press law, Amnesty International said today.

Editors Ibrahim Eissa of the daily *Al-Dustour*, Wael al-Abrashy of the weekly *Sawt al-Umma*, Adel Hammouda of the weekly *Al-Fajr*, and Abdel Halim Qandil, former editor of the weekly *Al-Karama* each received a one-year prison sentence. All were fined 20,000 Egyptian Pounds (around USD3500) after they were found guilty of "publishing false information likely to disturb public order". They were all released on bail pending their appeal.

The four editors were sentenced under Article 188 of the Egyptian Penal Code, which stipulates that anyone who "malevolently publishes false news, statements or rumours that is likely to disturb public order", will be punished by a maximum one-year prison sentence and a fine that would not exceed 20,000 Egyptian Pounds.

The trial of the four editors, of which Amnesty International observed a session in April 2007, is part of a continuous series of attacks against free press in Egypt. Ibrahim Eissa will appear in court on 1 October 2007 in connection with publishing rumours regarding 79-year-old President Mubarak's alleged deteriorating health.

In July 2006, a controversial press law was passed by parliament that further curtailed freedom of expression. Certain publishing offences, such as insulting public officials, continued to carry custodial sentences. Independent and opposition newspapers withheld publication for a day in protest at the new law and hundreds of media workers protested outside the National Assembly.

Public Document

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