

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 16/012/2002 (Public)

News Service No: 175

3 October 2002

Jordan: Acquittal of political prisoners welcomed

Amnesty International welcomed today the acquittal by the State Security Court (SSC) of six out of nine men who had been tried and convicted on 22 July 2001 by the same court on charges of carrying out politically motivated bombings and belonging to an illegal organization *Jama'at al-Islah wa'l-Tahaddi* (Reform and Challenge Group).

Five of the men -- 'Abd al-Naser Shehadeh al-Khamayseh, Samer Mahmud 'Amer; Ra'ed 'Abd al-Karim al-Kafafi, Ahmad Husayn 'Abdallah and Samir Sa'id Shabayeh -- were then sentenced to life imprisonment. Khaled Tawfiq al-'Aruri, a former policeman, was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, and three others were sentenced to life imprisonment *in absentia*. These sentences were subsequently rejected by the Court of Cassation which ordered a retrial by the SSC. The three defendants sentenced to life imprisonment were not acquitted.

While held incommunicado at the General Intelligence Department in Wadi al-Sir, the prisoners alleged that they were subjected to torture including beatings, sleep deprivation and being suspended from the ceiling.

Amnesty International has repeatedly raised its concerns with the Jordanian authorities about the unfair trial of these men, which include allegations that evidence was extracted under duress.

"Now that the men have been acquitted, the Jordanian authorities must order an independent investigation into the allegations of torture, and provide them with reparation -- including financial compensation -- in view of the ordeal they have been through," Amnesty International said.

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