

URGENT ACTION

COURT TO TRY 494 PEOPLE OVER PROTESTS

A court in Cairo is due to try 494 people for their alleged role in violence during protests in August 2013, in a case which may lead to mass death sentences. Those on trial include 11 children and 18-year-old Ibrahim Halawa, an Egyptian-Irish national who Amnesty International has established is a prisoner of conscience.

The trial relates to protests that took place on 16 and 17 August 2013, in the Ramsis area of central Cairo. At least 97 people died in the protests – most as a result of a reckless use of force by the security forces. More than 400 of the 494 defendants have been charged with murder and attempted murder, offences punishable by death under Egyptian law. The remainder have been charged with offences including “destroying public property”, “protesting without authorization”, “attacking the security forces” and “hindering the work of national institutions”.

According to the case file, seen by Amnesty International, most of the over 100 witnesses due to be called in the trial are police officers or government officials. Others among the 494 may also be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

The trial was scheduled to start on 12 August, but was delayed after the judges due to hear the case recused themselves after the defendants' lawyers objected to them. The Cairo Appeals Court will schedule another court panel of judges at a later date, likely to be soon.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the Egyptian authorities to ensure the trial of all 494 defendants in connection with the August 2013 protests complies with international fair trial standards, without recourse to the death penalty;
- Calling on them to ensure that anyone under the age of 18 is treated in accordance with the principles of juvenile justice and, if detained, is held separately from adults;
- Calling on them to release Ibrahim Halawa immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Urging them to also release any others detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 25 SEPTEMBER 2014 TO:

Public Prosecutor

Hesham Mohamed Zaki Barakat
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Supreme Court House, 1 “26 July” Road
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 577 4716
+202 2 575 7165
(switched off after office hours, GMT+3)
Salutation: Dear Counsellor

President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 391 1441
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign
Affairs for Human Rights
Mahy Hassan Abdel Latif
Multilateral Affairs and International
Security Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 574 9713
Email: Contact.Us@mfa.gov.eg

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The protests that took place on 16 and 17 August 2013, in Ramsis, were held in support of ousted president Mohamed Morsi and began peacefully. However, following clashes with the security forces, protestors sought safety in al-Fath Mosque, where they locked themselves in overnight. The security forces then shot tear gas into the mosque, which led to at least one woman dying by suffocation.

There was an exchange of fire between the security forces and the outer areas of the mosque, in which the security forces have alleged the protestors were involved. However, Amnesty International researchers who were present at the time have established that there is no way that the protestors could have fired at the security forces, as they were all locked inside the inner part of the mosque.

Ibrahim Halawa, then aged 17, and his three sisters were among those arrested after taking refuge in the mosque. He was shot in his hand when the security forces stormed the building, but was not given access to medical care for his injury, and the only treatment he received was from a cellmate who happened to be a doctor. He was detained with adults, contrary to Egypt's Child Law which provides that children must be held in juvenile detention centres and be separated from adults.

In recent months there has been a notable increase in the number of death sentences handed down in cases that involve murder in connection with riots and mass demonstrations. Courts have sentenced hundreds to death after what Amnesty International has documented as grossly unfair trials. They include some of the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, to which ousted president Mohamed Morsi belonged.

According to Egyptian press reports, the grand mufti, the country's most senior religious figure, has refused to endorse death sentences in another trial of other Muslim Brotherhood supporters, saying there was not enough evidence to support the charges. The mufti apparently added that the charges by the Prosecution depended entirely on investigations and testimonies of National Security officers. Under Egyptian law, courts must consult with the mufti before handing down death sentences, though his opinion is not legally binding.

International law relating to the right to fair trial requires that all defendants must be tried in their presence, so they are able to hear and challenge the Prosecution case and present a defence, in person or through a lawyer. They must be able to call witnesses on their behalf and examine witnesses against them. Since 16 June 2014, Amnesty International has also documented new executions in Egypt, the first since October 2011.

Name: Ibrahim Halawa (m) and 493 others
Gender m/f: both

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