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ARTICLE 19

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ARTICLE 19 Applauds UN Experts' Decision on Arbitrary Detention of Egyptian Blogger Kareem Amer

On 23 March 2009, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) released its opinion in the case of Egyptian blogger Kareem Amer. The WGAD concluded that Kareem Amer has been detained arbitrarily by the Egyptian authorities for his online critique and for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

“The UN Expert body’s conclusion that Kareem Amer’s detention was arbitrary is to be applauded. It sends a timely reminder to the Egyptian authorities and others around the world that imprisonment of critical voices, including those expressing themselves through blogs, cannot be tolerated and it is a violation of international human rights standards” said Dr Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

Abdel Kareem Suliman Amer, known as Kareem Amer, was first arrested in 2006 for writing critical articles that were considered to be defamatory against the religious Al Azhar Institute and the Head of State.

Amer was convicted in February 2007 for insulting religion and the president, and is currently serving a four-year jail term for both charges. Human rights organisations reported that Amer was beaten up in prison and subjected to torture.

Human rights activists have launched online campaigns across the Arab world and internationally to free Amer. In his words published via a Twitter campaign, Amer said: *“Prison has become a part of my imagination. I don’t remember how life was before my imprisonment and how people look like outside.”*

Freely expressing yourself in Egypt constitutes a serious risk for bloggers and writers. Authorities are using the concept of defamation of religion as an excuse to curb a freedom which is trying to impart and publish information.

In its statement, the WGAD affirmed that: *“the deprivation of the liberty of Mr. Abdel Kareem Nabil Suliman Amer is arbitrary, contrary to articles 9, 10, and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”*

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Egyptian authorities to release Kareem Amer and to repeal legislation, including articles within the Penal Code that violate international standards on freedom of expression.

Dr. Callamard adds: *“The Opinion of the WGAD is also a very important reminder that the international community must act swiftly to repeal two main legal threats to freedom of expression the world over. Crimes of defamation, slander or libel must be decriminalised as a matter of urgency, and any attempts to establish defamation of religion as a permissible restriction to freedom of expression must be condemned and prevented.”*

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Sa’eda Kilani, sa’eda@article19.org
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.
- The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention is a UN-mandated body of independent human rights experts that investigates cases of arbitrary arrest and detention that may be in violation of international human rights law. It was established in 1991 by the Commission on Human Rights within special procedures created to monitor human rights violations. Since 2006, the WGAD is under the purview of the UN Human Rights Council.