

Egypt: Call for Immediate Release of Jailed Blogger Karim Amer

Background:

In February 2007, Egyptian blogger Karim Amer was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for the "crime" of publishing on the internet material critical of Islam and President Mubarak. The then 23-year-old former al-Azhar University student was sentenced on 22 February 2007 and the Court of Appeal confirmed the sentence on 12 March of the same year. Amnesty International described the sentence as yet another slap in the face of freedom of expression in Egypt. Karim Amer is serving his sentence in Alexandria's Borg Al-Arab Prison. He was first held together with petty criminals, and said in a letter to one of his lawyers that he was beaten on 24 October 2007. He said he was punched and kicked by a prisoner and a prison guard under the supervision of a prison officer. One of his teeth was broken and he was badly bruised. He was then taken to a disciplinary cell and beaten again, this time handcuffed and with his legs bound, by the same two men on the orders of the same prison officer. Amnesty International considers Karim Amer to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned on account of the peaceful expression of his views. The organization condemned the four-year sentence he received and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

Please Send Letters To:

The Hon. Sameh Shoukry
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt
3521 International Ct. NW
Washington DC 20008
FAX: 202.244.4319
Email: Embassy@egyptembassy.net

President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak
Arab Republic of Egypt
'Abedine Palace
Cairo, Egypt
Email: webmaster@presidency.gov.eg

Minister of the Interior Habib Ibrahim El Adly
Ministry of the Interior
25 Al-Sheikh Rihan Street, Bab al-Louk
Cairo, Egypt
Email: moi@idsc.gov.eg

Sample Letter:

Dear _____,

I am respectfully writing in concern for student blogger Karim Amer, who was sentenced to four years' imprisonment on 22 February 2007 in Alexandria for publishing on the Internet material critical of both Islam and Egyptian President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak.

Amnesty International believes Karim Amer is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and should be immediately and unconditionally released.

We fear that his arrest is part of a larger effort by the Egyptian government to muzzle civil society and free expression of speech. His arrest has had a chilling effect on the growing number of Internet bloggers and writers who have been instrumental in reporting on human rights abuses and expanding freedom of expression in Egypt and elsewhere.

It is also true that even if some of Karim's opinions might be considered as offensive by some Muslims, he should not be tried and sentenced to jail for peacefully expressing his views.

Amnesty International is not alone in our concerns about this case. In March 2009, UN experts of the Human Rights Council stated that the Egyptian authorities detained Karim arbitrarily for his online criticisms and for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Egypt's tradition of a vigorous civil society and great writers and scholars is well known. The Egyptian government recognized that tradition by pledging to uphold the freedom of expression of its citizens in its own constitution and in international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We welcome that commitment but also expect that you will take steps to follow through on that pledge.

Please take action now to immediately and unconditionally release Karim Amer. We also encourage you to ensure that there is a thorough and impartial investigation into his allegations of ill-treatment and to take action to repeal all provisions in the Penal Code that allow for prison sentences for publishing offenses.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,