



For immediate release – 9 October 2008

Egypt: ARTICLE 19 Welcomes Presidential Pardon of Ibrahim Eissa and Calls on Egyptian Government to End the Imprisonment of Journalists on Publication Crimes

Ibrahim Eissa, editor in chief of opposition newspaper *Al-Dustour*, received a presidential pardon on the 6th of October, 2008 on charges of publishing “false information...likely to damage public interest and security.” Eissa was sentenced to two months in prison on September 28th 2008 after publishing articles in August 2007 which speculated on the health of President Hosni Mubarak.

“In recent years Egyptian journalists have been subjected to repeated government-lead attacks that aim to silence dissent and which undermine freedom of expression in Egypt. ARTICLE 19 is hopeful that the early release of Ibrahim Eissa marks an improvement in the Egyptian government’s treatment of media professionals” said Dr. Agnes Callamard, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19.

ARTICLE 19 welcomes the early release of Ibrahim Eissa and calls on the Egyptian government to immediately halt the imprisonment of journalists for publication crimes. Egypt’s Penal Code criminalizes ‘insulting the president’ and defamation of government under the pretext of public interest and national security. ARTICLE 19 strongly urges the Egyptian government to reform its penal code which contradicts standards set under international treaties signed by Egypt such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

Background Information:

Ibrahim Eissa is widely perceived as a pioneer of independent reporting in Egypt after successfully establishing *Al-Dustour* in 1995 as an independent opposition newspaper willing to criticise the Egyptian government, and to challenge socio-political norms. The prosecution of Ibrahim Eissa was thus widely seen as a direct attack on freedom of expression and freedom of information by an Egyptian government intent on silencing opposition voices.

In September 2007, Eissa was charged under Egypt’s penal code, with publishing false information, after publishing articles in August 2007 discussing the state of Mubarak’s health and criticising the Egyptian government’s information blackout. In one *Dustour* article, Ibrahim Eissa stated:-

“The president in Egypt is a god and gods don’t get sick. Thus, President Mubarak, those surrounding him, and the hypocrites hide his illness and leave the country prey to rumors. It is not a serious illness. It’s just old age. But the Egyptian people are entitled to know if the president is down with something as minor as the flu.”

Ibrahim Eissa has long been a thorn in the side of the Egyptian government as editor in chief of Egypt’s foremost opposition newspaper. He is one of four leading Egyptian opposition newspaper editors who were subject to criminal prosecution in 2007 in respect of print articles critical of the Egyptian government. These include Adel Hammouda of *Al Fagr*, Wael el Ebrashi of *Sawt al- Umma* and Abel-Halim Qandil of *Al Karama*.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- 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.