



human rights *first*

FORMERLY THE LAWYERS COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

President Hosni Mubarak
His Excellency Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
'Abedine Palace
Cairo, Egypt

March 3, 2005

Dear President Mubarak,

Human Rights First, an independent nongovernmental human rights organization based in New York, is concerned about the threats and violent intimidation directed against supporters of the imprisoned opposition political leader, Ayman Nour.

On the evening of February 24, a group of 22 men violently disrupted a meeting of Mr. Nour's supporters at the Pyramisa Hotel in Cairo. The meeting had been called to promote reform of the Egyptian Constitution and to express support for Nour.

From the accounts of eye-witnesses, this was a coordinated attack that could only have happened in such a heavily-policed setting with the consent of the authorities. Fifteen men dressed in white "training suits" disrupted the proceedings, first shouting down the speakers and then throwing chairs, glasses and cups at them. The group, that was accompanied by seven men dressed in civilian clothes but armed with pistols, then attacked the panelists, beating Wael Nawara, an assistant to Mr. Nour, and Nour's lawyer, Ehab al-Khouly, who is assistant secretary-general of the *Al-Ghad* (Tomorrow) political party.

Police, who are stationed at the hotel, did not intervene to prevent the assault on people who were simply exercising their basic rights to freedom of assembly and expression. These rights are protected in the Egyptian Constitution and in international human rights instruments to which Egypt is a State Party, like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Human Rights First welcomes your recent initiative to call on the People's Assembly to amend Article 76 of the Constitution, thereby permitting contested direct elections for the presidency. We believe that such an amendment would be in accordance with your stated goal of advancing democracy in Egypt, and

Headquarters

333 Seventh Avenue
13th Floor
New York, NY 10001
Tel: (212) 845-5200
Fax: (212) 845-5299

Washington D.C. Office

100 Maryland Avenue, N.E.
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002
Tel: (202) 547-5692
Fax: (202) 543-5999

www.humanrightsfirst.org

compatible with international human rights standards. However, the persistence of violations of basic rights and freedoms of Egyptian citizens, such as those described in this letter calls into question the seriousness of your government's commitment to political reform.

Moreover, the continued detention of Ayman Nour on highly questionable charges of having forged documents when applying for legal recognition of the Al Ghad Party last year also raises doubts.

We urge you to ensure that nonviolent political activists in Egypt, who wish to engage in open public debate about constitutional reform, will be protected from physical attacks and intimidation from vigilante groups apparently acting in collusion with the security forces, or from any other quarter.

The process of political change, which is a healthy and inevitable part of any open political system, is best served by adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights standards. As Egypt moves towards presidential elections, scheduled for October 2005, we urge you to ensure that basic rights of freedom of expression and assembly will be respected, especially for those who would criticize the current policies of your government.

Sincerely,



Neil Hicks
Director of International Programs

Cc: Ambassador Nabil Fahmy
The Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt
3521 International Ct. NW
Washington DC 20008
Fax: (202) 244 5131