



human rights *first*

30th
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September 3, 2008

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

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Dear President Mubarak:

On behalf of Human Rights First, an independent nongovernmental human rights organization based in New York, I would like to express our deep concern about the arrest and continued detention of blogger Mohamed Refaat.

We understand that Mr. Refaat, a 22-year-old student at Cairo University, was arrested on July 21, 2008, after reporting to state security. He had gone to the authorities retrieve his personal computer, which had been seized by security officers during an early morning raid from his home while he was not present. Reportedly, among the accusations he faces are that he used his blog to incite a strike on July 23.

We are particularly troubled that despite the fact that on August 17, 2008 state security decided to release Mr. Refaat, another division within the agency's investigative branches has continued to detain him in the Wadi Natrun prison under Egypt's Emergency Laws.

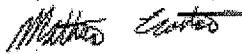
We register our concern in light of recent reports of a widening crackdown on bloggers and other internet users, including the arrest, on July 23, 2008, of 14 young Internet activists, the so-called "Facebook Youth," including Ahmed Maher, a 27-year-old engineer who had used the Internet social networking site, "Facebook" to create a group calling for national strikes to express solidarity with textile workers in Mahalla, in northern Egypt.

We understand that the 14 men arrested on July 23 have all been released. However, we fear that new regulations obliging Internet cafes to gather and keep the personal information (including names, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers) of Internet users will have a chilling effect on free expression in Egypt and could result in further arrests of bloggers and Internet activists.

We call upon the Egyptian government to adhere to international standards protecting the right of freedom of expression, which is granted not only by Article 47 of the Egyptian Constitution, but also by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt became a party in 1982. Although the Egyptian government has long invoked national security concerns and its Emergency Laws to curtail these freedoms, the abuse of such powers, particularly in cases that clearly pose no threat to public safety or national security, contradict your government's commitment to political reform and democracy.

We urge, therefore, that Mohamed Refaat be released, and that you ensure that freedom of expression is respected.

Sincerely,



Matt Easton
Director
Human Rights Defenders Program
Human Rights First

cc: General Habib El Adly
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
El Sheikh Riham Street
Bab El Louk
Cairo, Egypt

cc: Ambassador Nabil Fahmy
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