

Mohamed Hussein Tantawi,
Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
23, Khaleefa Al-Maamon
Kobri El Kobba,
Cairo
Egypt

1 June 2011

Dear Sir,

Reporters Without Borders wishes to draw your attention to the unacceptable pressure exerted by the armed forces on Egyptian journalists and bloggers as they try to keep the public informed.

Several have been summoned, arrested and interrogated by military justice officials about what they have written in recent weeks.

- Blogger **Hossam Al-Hamalawy** and journalists **Rim Magued** and **Nabil Sharaf Al-Din** were interrogated on 31 May for nearly three hours about their appearances on the TV station ON-TV. Al-Hamalawy, on Magued's 26 May programme, had accused military police of violating human rights and Sharaf Al-Din talked the next day about the chances of an alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and the army as part of a political transition.

- **Amr Khajafa**, editor of the newspaper *El-Shorouk*, and two of his journalists, were interrogated by the national military court on 19 May about an article suggesting former President Hosni Mubarak could be amnestied which was said to contain lies and to be liable to create public unrest. They were freed after proving they had consulted military officials before publication.

- Female blogger **Botheina Kamel** was summoned by the military court on 15 May for interrogation after criticising the army on the station Nile TV.

- More seriously, blogger **Maikel Nabil Sanad** was sentenced to three years in prison on 11 April (with no right of appeal) for questioning on his blog the apparent neutrality of the army during the anti-government protests in January and February. He is the country's first prisoner of conscience since the revolution.

Foreign minister Nabil al-Arabi said on 19 April that Egypt was trying to achieve "the rule of law." Respect for the rule of law and its supremacy requires an independent and impartial system of justice, not the arbitrary use of military courts. Trying a civilian in a military court, which has no jurisdiction over him, is a violation of the right to a fair trial guaranteed by article 14 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Egypt has ratified.

Egypt must guarantee basic rights, especially freedom of expression, whatever the targets of public criticism, to help its transition to democracy. Freedom of expression was one of the revolution's key demands and discussion of once-taboo subjects – such as regime corruption, the army and criticism of the current president – must be allowed.

If the army has a special status exempting it from criticism it will stand in the way of the move towards democracy. It also cannot have pre-publication censorship rights over articles that concern the military. We note that military trials of civilians and the many attacks on the media and bloggers have led to new protests to safeguard the spirit of the revolution and defend freedom of expression.

The treatment of Egypt's journalists and bloggers recalls the practices of the Mubarak years. Blogger **Ahmed Abdel Fattah Mustafa** was tried in March 2010 for publishing "false news" and "defaming the armed forces." He was only freed after agreeing to apologise on his blog. **Ahmed Hassan Bassiouny** is still serving a six-month prison sentence for giving advice on Facebook to future army recruits.

Reporters Without Borders notes your promise on 13 May, on the Supreme Council's official Facebook page, to free the activists jailed in March and April. We ask you to keep this promise and to end arbitrary arrests and interrogations. We also ask you to do all you can to obtain the immediate release of Nabil Sanad and Bassiouny, who have been unjustly imprisoned

I hope you will give these matters your closest attention. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

My best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JF Julliard', written over a horizontal line.

Jean-François Julliard
Secretary-general