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EGYPTIAN AUTHORITIES CLAMP DOWN ON DISSENT

Middle East Watch is concerned that the Egyptian government is using its emergency law and other measures to stifle emerging domestic dissent against the Gulf War. In a letter to President Hosni Mubarak dated February 11, Middle East Watch said that a recent wave of arrests and administrative detentions, coupled with military court proceedings against journalists, raise "the inevitable suspicion that the Egyptian authorities may be using detention powers under the emergency law to curtail the freedom of expression of those who are raising their voices in dissent against prevailing government policy." Egyptian human rights lawyers estimate that as many as 200 political activists and students may have been detained since a crackdown began on February 7.

The independent Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), based in Cairo, stated in an appeal on February 4 that human rights violations in Egypt have increased since the Gulf crisis began and, with the outbreak of war last month, these violations have escalated. EOHR argued that harsh legal measures are being used to deny freedom of opinion and expression to those Egyptians who publicly dissent from government policy:

EOHR notes that authorities are applying such measures selectively, i.e., applying them only against the right of anti-war protesters to express their opinion. No matter how limited in scale those protests were, authorities have used extremely severe methods in facing them, including imprisonment or martial trials. On the other hand, pro-war views are freely expressed, pro-war demonstrations are allowed, and pro-war views have access to mass media (television, broadcast, and national newspapers, all of which are owned and controlled by the government).

President Mubarak, in a January 24 speech before a joint session of the People's Assembly and the Consultative Council, carried live on state radio and television, opposed a cease-fire in the Gulf War and insisted that the war could end only if Iraq withdrew from Kuwait. He also affirmed that: "Democracy is the core of our life today, tomorrow, and every day." Nevertheless, in a clear challenge to Egyptian journalists and writers, Mubarak warned:

Allow me to tell some writers, despite their minority, who do not realize the pan-Arab responsibility in these fateful hours: Live up to your national conscience...If you disregard the fact that our Egyptian forces on the battlefield are performing their duty, this

imposes a national commitment on you, because the people do not disregard this fact and stand in one line, as one shield, as one umbrella for their Armed Forces. Beware of being dragged away from this national duty, in which a hair's breadth separates light from darkness, commitment from noncommitment, and trust from betrayal.

Magdi Hussein, a leader of the opposition Islamist Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and a journalist, was arrested the next day, after he spoke against the war at a Cairo mosque. Mr. Hussein and a colleague, Nagy El Shahaby, another SLP leader, were subsequently charged by State Security prosecutors with publishing and distributing anti-war materials. Since Mr. Hussein's arrest, others have been arrested, including Adel El Mashad, a key figure in the Committee for the Defense of National Culture, which has been active in organizing Egyptian intellectuals against the war.

In view of these developments, Middle East Watch called on the Egyptian president to reaffirm Egypt's respect for international human rights norms, including the right to be free from arbitrary arrest, detention and torture; the right to be tried by an independent and impartial tribunal; the right to freedom of expression and association; and the right to peaceful assembly. The Arab Republic of Egypt ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1982.

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Middle East Watch was created in 1989 to monitor human rights practices in the Middle East and North Africa and to promote respect for internationally recognized standards. It is a component of Human Rights Watch, a non-governmental organization which is also composed of Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, and Helsinki Watch. The chairman of Middle East Watch is Gary Sick, the vice chairs are Lisa Anderson and Bruce Rabb, the executive director is Andrew Whitely, the research director is Eric Goldstein, and the associate director is Virginia N. Sherry.

Recent Newsletters of Middle East Watch include:

- "Middle East Watch Condemns Great Britain for Holding 35 Iraqi Residents as Prisoners of War and Detaining Dozens of Arabs for Deportation" (February 10, 1991)**
- "Under the Toughest Curfew Since 1973, West Bank and Gaza Palestinians Face Growing Hardship" (January 27, 1991)**
- "Middle East Watch Urges All Parties to the Conflict to Obey Rules of Law Protecting Civilians" (January 18, 1991)**
- "Kuwait: Deteriorating Human Rights Conditions Since the Early Occupation" (November 16, 1990)**
- "Egypt: Election Concerns" (November 15, 1990)**
- "The Conduct of Iraqi Troops in Kuwait Toward Kuwaitis and Non-Westerners" (September 1990)**
- "Middle East Watch Condemns Iraq's Practices toward Foreigners under Its Control and Reminds Embargo Participants of Their Humanitarian Obligations" (August 29, 1990)**