



Finally freed, Saad Eddin Ibrahim plans to continue his work

by Robert Lebowitz, Digital Freedom Network

(March 24, 2003) Enjoying his first week of freedom in two years, Egyptian democracy leader Saad Eddin Ibrahim told the Digital Freedom Network that he planned to get back to his work as soon as he returned from a trip abroad for medical treatment.

"There is much to accomplish," said Dr. Ibrahim in an interview with DFN following his acquittal on two-year-old charges of fraud and espionage. "I will continue to push for constitutional reform and to work for the improvement of minority rights, particularly those of Coptic Christian groups — all of the same issues I was involved with before my imprisonment."

Dr. Ibrahim emerged victorious from Egypt's Court of Cassation on March 18 after the court issued a "Not Guilty" verdict and dismissed the Egyptian government's long-standing charges against him. In May 2001, Dr. Ibrahim had been sentenced to seven years imprisonment for receiving funding without authorization, disseminating false information abroad, and appropriating money by fraudulent means. A subsequent appeal was dismissed, causing Dr. Ibrahim and his family to bring his case to the Court of Cassation in a last-ditch effort to win his freedom.



Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim (above) vows to continue the human rights work he was doing before his arrest.

Dr. Ibrahim attributed the acquittal to the fact that he was tried in the Court of Cassation — Egypt's appeals court — rather than the Special State Security Court where his case had been heard previously. The Special State Security Court was created by former president Anwar Sadat to deal with national security issues during a brief period when emergency law was not in place, and it routinely dispenses with due process.

"[The Court of Cassation] was a true court," explained Dr. Ibrahim, "while the other courts were exceptional courts to be used under emergency law. I had been convicted by these State Security Courts.

"There was no case against me, and in the end, this court recognized that."

Several other human rights activists affiliated with Dr. Ibrahim's think-tank, the Ibn Khaldun Center, who had been found guilty along with Dr. Ibrahim, were also acquitted along with him. The Ibn

Khaldun Center was shut down by the government in June, 2000, but Dr. Ibrahim says that has no doubt that now it will reopen soon.

A man with unpopular positions

Saad Eddin Ibrahim is a world-renowned sociologist whose influence has permeated many segments of Egyptian life. He has been a frequent commentator on political affairs across the Arab media, an analyst of issues concerning racism and ethnic minorities, and an educator of Egypt's elite at the American University in Cairo. In 1985, Ibrahim began the Ibn Khaldun Center, which investigates voting practices in Egypt. Many of Ibrahim's positions and opinions have been unpopular with Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and the ruling party.

He has advocated a full normalization of relations with Israel, more latitude for the more moderate Islamic fundamentalists, and fairer treatment of the Copts. He has stridently criticized voting practices and has demanded democratic freedoms.

Arrest and imprisonment

In the summer of 2000, his house was surrounded by dozens of State Security Investigation guards, some of whom stormed in and confiscated his files, books and computer. Simultaneously, other members of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies were arrested. By dawn the next day, Dr. Ibrahim was under arrest in the State Security Investigation's headquarters. He was subjected to a lengthy and bewildering interrogation, and only released on bail some six weeks later.

On May 23, 2002, he was found guilty by Egypt's State Security Court of a multitude of charges and [sentenced to seven years of hard labor](#). Dr. Ibrahim appealed that charge, only to have another State Security Court dismiss that appeal in August.

Dr. Ibrahim suffers from a degenerative neurological condition. Still, despite his confinement and his illness — which was exacerbated by his incarceration — Dr. Ibrahim did not desist from his human rights work. Dr. Ibrahim stated that he had sent an initiative to Saddam Hussein from his jail cell in an effort to negotiate some kind of peace and avoid an armed conflict in Iraq. "Innocent civilians are the ones who pay the price in every war," said Dr. Ibrahim. "I only hope it is over quickly."

"Whatever I encounter in the way of harassment, I am ready to take it on."

Still, Dr. Ibrahim is optimistic about human rights in the Middle East. In an online chat with the Digital Freedom Network this past January while he was awaiting this most recent verdict, Dr. Ibrahim pointed to evidence that conditions were

improving.

"When I started in human rights 20 years ago, there were no human rights organizations," said Dr. Ibrahim. "Now there are at least 50 in the Arab world. It has been an uphill fight, but we have persisted and we have won. My case is an example of the changing trend. There are hundreds of thousands of people like me and we

will continue to make gains."

But does Dr. Ibrahim not fear more harassment by the Egyptian government, particularly after having languished through this past two- year ordeal?

"This remains to be seen," responded Dr. Ibrahim with equanimity. "We shall see. Whatever I encounter in the way of harassment, I am ready to take it on."



RELATED MATERIAL

- [In spite of his plight, an optimist](#): Egyptian democracy leader Saad Eddin Ibrahim chats with DFN on the eve of his final retrial.(February 4, 2003)
- [Saad Eddin Ibrahim found guilty once again](#):For a second time, Egypt's most prominent human rights activist was convicted of fraud, bribery, and spreading false information. (July 29, 2002)
- [Saad Eddin Ibrahim granted new trial](#): Egypt's highest appeals court finds flaws in renowned human rights activist's previous trial. (February 6, 2002)

RELATED SITES

- [Ibn Kaldhun Center](#)
- [Arab Organization for Human Rights](#)
- [Democracy Egypt](#)

[Home](#) | [Take a stand](#) | [Volunteer](#) | [Subscribe](#)
[News](#) | [Online chats](#) | [Related links](#) | [Download](#) | [Activist's workshop](#)
[About us](#) | [Media kit](#) | [Our positions](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Site map](#)

Unless otherwise noted, all material [copyright © 2003 Digital Freedom Network](#).