

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: EGY35071
Country: Egypt
Date of Request: 16 June 2009
Date: 30 June 2009

Keywords: Egypt – Muslim Brotherhood – 2005 Parliamentary elections

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Questions

- 1. What is the current attitude of Egyptian authorities towards supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood?**
- 2. Are supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood routinely detained and interrogated?**
- 3. Were Muslim Brotherhood supporters targeted before, during, or after the Egyptian Assembly elections in 2006?**

RESPONSE

1. What is the current attitude of Egyptian authorities towards supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood?

The US Department of State's 2008 report on religious freedom in Egypt states that the "Government outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood, which operates missionary, charitable, and political activities, in 1954 but has tolerated its operations with varying levels of interference. Muslim Brothers speak openly and publicly about their views and identify themselves as members of the organization, although they remain subject to arbitrary detention and pressure from the Government". A range of sources report that large numbers of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) activists have been arrested or detained over recent years. The International Crisis Group (ICG) reports that the surprise success of the MB in the 2005 parliamentary elections "sent shockwaves through Egypt's political system" and the regime has engaged in a renewed crackdown on the movement since. According to ICG, the security crackdown occurs most especially around election times or anytime when the group engages in public protests. Large-scale public protests on various issues by MB activists continue to be reported. An article in the Spring 2009 edition of *The Middle East Report (MER)* reports that on 9 January 2009 "some 200,000 Muslim Brothers staged over 90 demonstrations" around Egypt to

protest the long-standing international blockade of Gaza. The demonstrations resulted again in large-scale arrests. According to the *MER* report, the authorities pre-empted demonstrations in Cairo with a massive security presence in the capital. The report states that “[i]n the rest of the country, the regime allowed the demonstrations, but then carried out mass arrests of the participants. No group felt the regime’s hammer blow as acutely as the Society of Muslim Brothers. According to the group’s official website, nearly 1,700 Brothers were arrested” (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Egypt*, 19 September – Attachment 1; International Crisis Group 2008, *Egypt’s Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?*, Middle East/North Africa Report no.76, 18 June – Attachment 2; Stacher, J. 2009, ‘The Brothers and the Wars’, *Middle East Report*, vol. 250, Spring <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/stacher.html> – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 3).

In June 2008 ICG published an extensive study on the situation of the MB in Egypt. A comprehensive overview of the complex relationship between the MB and President Hosni Mubarak’s regime is provided in the report (see pages 3 to 15) (International Crisis Group 2008, *Egypt’s Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?*, Middle East/North Africa Report no.76, 18 June – Attachment 2).

The US Department of State’s most recent report on human rights in Egypt (released in February 2009) provides the following assessment of the status of the MB noting that it “remained an illegal organization; however, independent members of Parliament linked to the MB continued to participate actively in Parliament”. The report notes the arrest or detention large numbers of MB activists in recent years as well as several press or blogging personalities who have been members of the MB. According to the US Department of State: “government held detainees, including many MB activists, for several weeks to several months or longer, and did not permit international humanitarian organizations access to political prisoners”; and: “During the weeks leading up to April 8 [2008] local council elections, police detained an estimated 1,000 MB members, 148 of whom were potential candidates”. It is also reported that: “On November 20 [2008], State Security arrested MB-affiliated blogger Mohammed Adel and allegedly tortured him”; and that: “On November 11 [2008], Egyptian authorities banned MB-affiliated doctors Essam Al Eryan and Mohamed Gamal Heshmat from traveling to Damascus to attend a conference on ‘The Right of Return for Palestinians’”. Pertinent extracts follow:

On April 15, a closed military tribunal sentenced Muslim Brotherhood (MB) Second Deputy Chairman Khairat El Shater and 24 other civilian MB members, seven in absentia, to prison terms ranging from three to 10 years on charges including money laundering and planning terrorist activities. The tribunal acquitted 15 others. A Cairo civilian criminal court had acquitted 17 of the defendants of all charges in January 2007, but police rearrested them immediately after the verdict, and President Mubarak transferred their cases to the tribunal along with 23 others. This marked the first use of a military tribunal against civilians since MB trials in 2002. The tribunal regularly barred press and observers from human rights organizations and occasionally excluded defense attorneys and family members. AI described the verdict as a “perversion of justice,” and Human Rights Watch (HRW) described it as a “transparently political verdict from a court that should have no authority to try civilians.”

On June 3, MB lawyers filed a complaint against the government regarding the validity of the trial; a military judge confirmed the verdicts on July 13. The Administrative Court postponed the appeal court session to March 2009.

...Egyptian human rights organizations estimated in 2007 that 4,000 to 5,000 people remained in prolonged detention without charge under the law, though Minister of Interior Habib Al Adly stated that the total number of political prisoners and detainees does not exceed 1,800. There were varied and conflicting estimates of the number of “extraordinary detainees” (citizens held by the government, often without trial, for alleged political crimes). In 2006, credible domestic and international NGOs estimated that there were between 6,000 and 10,000 such detainees in addition to the prisoners in the ordinary criminal justice system. The government held detainees, including many MB activists, for several weeks to several months or longer, and did not permit international humanitarian organizations access to political prisoners.

As in previous years, the government arrested and detained hundreds of MB members and supporters without charge or trial. The precise number of MB activists in detention at year’s end was unknown, but the MB estimated that 250 members remained in detention.

During the weeks leading up to April 8 local council elections, police detained an estimated 1,000 MB members, 148 of whom were potential candidates. On July 9, SSIS [State Security Investigations Service] reportedly arrested at least 38 MB members in advance of the July 13 parliamentary by-elections for four open parliamentary seats. At year’s end the government had allegedly released most of the MB members who had been arrested before the local council elections.

...During the year a number of opposition political activists, journalists, and NGOs continued to advocate for political reform and openly criticized the government. A number of government actions including wide-scale detentions of MB members, lawsuits against independent journalists, and government restrictions on civil society organizations led many observers to charge that the government sought to curtail criticism and activism.

...During the year the Supreme Press Council revoked the licenses of at least 14 news publications. It revoked the licenses of 12 of the 14 newspapers according to council guidelines because the newspapers were not regularly published. It revoked the license of the magazine Al-Zuhour at the behest of SSIS after MB member Salah Abd-al-Maqsud was appointed editor-in-chief, and the newspaper Al-Shuruq Al-Gadid on the grounds that some of the journalists were shareholders, in violation of Press Syndicate regulations. By year’s end, Al-Shuruq Al-Gadid received a new license, though the others remained closed.

...On November 20, State Security arrested MB-affiliated blogger Mohammed Adel and allegedly tortured him. On November 21, SSIS seized many of his books and CDs from his home. Adel’s blog called for MB detainees to be released. At year’s end, Adel remained in custody.

...On November 11, Egyptian authorities banned MB-affiliated doctors Essam Al Eryan and Mohamed Gamal Heshmat from traveling to Damascus to attend a conference on “The Right of Return for Palestinians.” In September the government refused to grant the MB permission to hold its annual Ramadan “iftar” dinner for hundreds of guests.

...On April 1 and 2, MB members demonstrated across the Delta area (Gharbeya, Qalyubiya, Zagazig and Alexandria) against government efforts to prevent the MB from running in the April 8 local elections. Authorities arrested hundreds of MB members and injured approximately 10 persons.

...On May 1, SSIS prevented MB member and blogger Abdel Moneim Mahmoud from traveling to Morocco to participate in a conference on press freedom.

... Many opposition candidates from registered political parties and the MB reported difficulties registering and alleged a government campaign to prevent opposition candidates from participating in the elections. More than 3,000 MB candidates prevented from registering sued the government. Although the courts ruled in favor of the MB candidates in 2,664 suits, the majority of the rulings were not implemented. The government arrested and detained an estimated 1,000 MB members prior to the elections. On March 30, HRW issued a statement noting that government arrests of MB-affiliated candidates “put the legitimacy of the election in serious doubt.” AI also expressed concern over the arrests and called for the government to release the detained individuals.

On April 7, following weeks of arrests and official hurdles placed in the way of candidate registration, the MB called on citizens to join it in “boycotting this fraudulent process.” Only 20 MB candidates registered and none ran for office after the MB announced its boycott.

... On July 3, Minister of Interior Habib Al Adly set parliamentary by-elections for four vacant parliament seats in Kafr Al Sheikh and Alexandria for July 13. The four seats had been vacant since a legal challenge during the 2005 parliamentary elections. The NDP won the four contested seats. MB-affiliated candidates ran for three of the seats, and the MB accused the government of rigging the vote to favor the NDP.

... The NDP continued to dominate national politics by maintaining an overriding majority in the People’s Assembly and the Shura Council. It also dominated local governments, mass media, labor, and the public sector, and controlled licensing of new political parties, newspapers, and private organizations. The law prohibits political parties based on religion, and the MB remained an illegal organization; however, independent members of Parliament linked to the MB continued to participate actively in Parliament (US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Egypt*, 25 February – Attachment 4. Also see: US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Egypt*, 19 September – Attachment 1).

A *Wall Street Journal* article dated 15 May 2009 looks in detail at the current situation for MB, in Egypt and elsewhere. Like the US Department of State, *The Wall Street Journal* article notes that although MB “is outlawed by the Egyptian state, the Brotherhood operates... more or less in the open. It maintains hundreds of offices and fields electoral candidates”. Nevertheless, the article also emphasises the regime’s crackdown on the group, especially following the success of the MB in the 2005 parliamentary elections, with the arrests of “thousands of rank-and-file members”. A “public-relations campaign” is also underway against the Brotherhood, according to this article, with state media linking the Brotherhood with Hamas and Hezbollah as a “hireling of Iran”. The article states:

The regime launched a wave of arrests and military trials against the group, as well, the harshest such security clampdown on the Brotherhood in decades. This dragnet ensnared thousands of rank-and-file members.

It also netted some Brotherhood leaders who ran the financial apparatus that funnels millions of dollars in donations and investment proceeds into campaigning and social outreach. The group’s third-in-command, businessman Khairat al Shater, was arrested in December 2006 and sentenced last year to seven years in prison for financing a banned group.

Government officials are unapologetic about the crackdown, which disrupted the Brothers’ social services. “We’re dealing with a clandestine organization,” says Ali Eddin Helal, information secretary of the ruling National Democratic Party.

The regime pressed its public-relations campaign against the Brotherhood last month, when it said it had cracked a cell of Lebanon's Hezbollah militia that was spying in Egypt and smuggling weapons to Hamas. State media painted the Brotherhood as an unpatriotic hiring of Iran, which sponsors Hamas and Hezbollah (Trofimov, Y. 2009, 'Muslim Brotherhood Falters as Egypt Outflanks Islamists', *Wall Street Journal*, 15 May <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124225195098016929.html> – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 5).

The Jamestown Foundation, in its 12 June 2009 *Terrorism Monitor* issue, also reports on the arrests of 24 men allegedly with Hezbollah links. The article states that "In addition to implicating Hezbollah and Iran in a web of conspiracy, official Egyptian media sources named Syria, Hamas, Qatar and its al-Jazeera satellite network, and Egypt's banned Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (Muslim Brotherhood), as being party to a plot against Egypt". The article further states:

Egypt's claim that the Ikhwan, the moderate, democratic reform-minded Islamist movement that represents the main opposition to Mubarak's rule, was active in the alleged scheme suggests an effort on the part of Cairo to tarnish the group's reputation domestically and internationally (al-Jazeera, April 18). The Ikhwan denied any involvement with or knowledge of the alleged cell (Zambelis, C. 2009, 'Hezbollah in Egypt: The Politics of Conspiracy and Resistance', *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 7, issue 16, The Jamestown Foundation website, 12 June http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35110&tx_tnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=cd5f290589 – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 6).

An *Inter Press Service* article dated 3 June 2009 reports that "[s]everal leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood opposition movement stand accused of plans to form an 'international network of organisational cells.' Its leaders say the charges are blatant fabrications". The article states "[s]ome of the group's spokesmen have suggested that the recent arrest campaign was aimed specifically at Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mehdi Akef, noting that a number of Akef's personal assistants had been detained in the recent sweep". Another MB leader "stated that the recent arrests were aimed primarily at pre-empting rapprochement between the Brotherhood and the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama" (Morrow, A. & Al-Omrani, K. 2009, 'EGYPT: Muslim Brotherhood on the Mat', *Inter Press Service*, 3 June <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47076> – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 7).

According to articles from Ikhwanweb (the official English-language MB website) and *Fox News* a number of prominent MB members were invited to US President Obama's Cairo speech ('Muslim Brotherhood in audience for Obama Cairo speech' 2009, The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) Official English Website, 3 June <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Article.asp?ID=20326&SectionID=0> – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 8; 'Muslim Brotherhood Members to Attend Obama's Cairo Speech' 2009, *FOXNews*, 3 June <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/06/03/muslim-brotherhood-members-attend-obamas-cairo-speech/> – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 9).

2. Are Muslim Brotherhood supporters routinely detained and interrogated?

As noted above, a range of sources report that large numbers of MB members and supporters have been arrested and detained in recent years. The June 2008 ICG report includes a section

(pp. 8-11) detailing the regime's security crackdown against MB, with numerous supporters arrested at various stages following the parliamentary elections in 2005 to the run-ups to the municipal elections in April 2008. According to ICG, the "pattern appeared to be that the security services would crack down every time the Muslim Brothers took to the streets (whatever the reason) or contested an election." The report states:

Muslim Brothers regard the large number of arrests – most of which are temporary – with stoicism, seeing them as the price to pay for continued political participation. While an internal debate rages over whether increased political participation (especially through elections) is worth the cost of repression, most members feel "no change can happen by doing nothing" (International Crisis Group 2008, *Egypt's Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?*, Middle East/North Africa Report no.76, 18 June, p. 11 – Attachment 2).

Research Response EGY34903, dated 25 May 2009, includes a section (pages 8-13) on the general treatment of Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers which lists a number of media reports of arrests of Muslim Brotherhood supporters (RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response EGY34903*, 25 May – Attachment 10).

Recent media

Recent media articles report continued arrests of MB members. The following is a selection of reportage over the last month.

The Muslim Brotherhood's English-language official website (<http://www.ikhwanweb.com/>) lists continual arrests of MB supporters and leaders. For example, a 27 June 2009 article reports that "State Security Services launched a wide crackdown today at dawn against three Muslim Brotherhood high-ranking figures in Cairo". A 26 June 2009 article reports that "Security Services in the Sharqeya province launched a raids campaign at dawn on a number of members and leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Hassan Saleh suburb in Zaqaziq" ('Abu el-Fotouh arrested in Crackdown' 2009, The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) Official English Website, 27 June <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Article.asp?ID=20623&LevelID=2&SectionID=0> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 18; 'Nine Muslim Brothers arrested in a raids campaign today' 2009, The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) Official English Website, 26 June <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Article.asp?ID=20611&LevelID=2&SectionID=0> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 19).

A *BBC Monitoring Middle East* item, dated 23 June 2009, includes the translations of three reports from Ikhwanonline, the Arabic-language official website of the Muslim Brotherhood, "detailing the continued action by the Egyptian authorities against the members of the MB Group in Egypt". Two reports denounce the continued imprisonment of leading members of the group. The third report "says that the MB Group issued a statement on 20 June 2009 saying that the 'fierce security onslaught on the leading figures and members of the MB Group is not conducive to the interests of the country, but to the interests of its enemies, who are the sponsors of the Zionist-US project'" ('Egyptian authorities continue action against members of Muslim Brotherhood' 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: Ikhwanonline website, 23 June – Attachment 11).

A *BBC Monitoring Middle East* item, dated 18 June 2009, includes the translations of three reports from Ikhwanonline "detailing the continued arrests/release of the members of the MB Group by the Egyptian authorities" ('Egyptian authorities continue to arrest, release Muslim

Brotherhood members' 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: Ikhwanonline website, 18 June – Attachment 12).

On 17 June 2009 *The New Zealand Herald* reports that “Egyptian police have arrested 25 more members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the country’s largest opposition movement”. The article continues:

The state news agency reports that the men were arrested in Beheira province north of Cairo for belonging to a banned organisation and distributing its materials.

Police arrested the men while they were holding an organisational meeting in the provincial capital of Damanhour. They will be held for 15 days pending an investigation.

The Brotherhood, which holds a fifth of the seats in parliament, is officially banned but allowed to compete in elections as independents.

The arrests were the latest chapter in the government’s long-running crackdown on the group (‘Egypt arrests 25 Muslim Brotherhood members’ 2009, *New Zealand Herald*, 17 June http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10578968 – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 13).

On 4 June 2009, prior to US President Obama’s speech in Cairo, a *Telegraph* correspondent based in Cairo reported that:

Local newspapers report a wave of arrests in and around Cairo last night. Opposition groups Kefaya and Muslim Brotherhood targeted.

That’s despite invites to 10 Muslim Brotherhood MPs to the speech (Spencer, R. 2009, ‘Barack Obama’s speech to the Muslim World: live update from the audience 2’, *Daily Telegraph (UK)*, updated 4 June http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/richardspencer/9968218/Barack_Obamas_speech_to_the_Muslim_World_live_update_from_the_audience_2/ – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 14).

In mid-May 2009, Abu Dhabi-based newspaper, *The National*, reported that “Egyptian authorities arrested 33 Muslim Brotherhood members over the weekend, including senior members, in the strongest move against the group in more than two years” (el Magd, N. 2009, ‘Egypt arrests 33 members of Muslim Brotherhood’, *The National*, 17 May <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090517/FOREIGN/705169854/1002> – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 15).

3. Were Muslim Brotherhood supporters targeted before, during, or after the Egyptian Assembly elections in 2006?

Note: Information found does not indicate that elections were held in Egypt in 2006. According to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Election Guide website, Presidential elections were held in September 2005 and Parliamentary elections were held in three stages in November-December 2005 (‘Country Profile: Egypt’ (undated), International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Election Guide website <http://electionguide.org/country.php?ID=65> – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 16). According to ICG, local municipal elections were supposed to be held in 2006 but were

delayed for two years. ICG states that the postponement was “widely seen as indicating the regime’s fear that the Muslim Brothers would ride a wave of public support” (International Crisis Group 2008, *Egypt’s Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?*, Middle East/North Africa Report no.76, 18 June, p. 7 – Attachment 2).

ICG details the Muslim Brotherhood’s participation in elections in 2005. According to this, there was little crackdown on MB members leading up to the parliamentary elections in November-December 2005. ICG states that there was, in effect, “a truce between the Brothers and the government throughout mid-2005”, which many commentators believed was an electoral arrangement with the NDP government. The report quotes a prominent Muslim Brother, stating that on the eve of the Parliamentary elections, “for the first time since 1995 there is not a single Muslim Brother in prison”. During the voting, however, ICG and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) both report that numerous MB supporters were arrested. ICG reports that MB’s electoral success “sent shockwaves through Egypt’s political system” and the regime engaged in a renewed crackdown on the movement. As noted previously, the report includes a section (pp. 8-11) detailing the security crackdown against MB, with hundreds of supporters arrested at various stages following the parliamentary elections in 2005 to the run-ups to the municipal elections in April 2008 (International Crisis Group 2008, *Egypt’s Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?*, Middle East/North Africa Report no.76, 18 June – Attachment 2; Otterman, S. 2005, ‘Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt’s Parliamentary Elections’, Council on Foreign Relations website, 1 December http://www.cfr.org/publication/9319/muslim_brotherhood_and_egypts_parliamentary_elections.html – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 17).

A Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) backgrounder on the Muslim Brotherhood and the 2005 parliamentary elections, authored by Sharon Otterman in December 2005, also notes the relatively open atmosphere prior to the elections, while “significant government repression” returned once the voting started, with more than 1000 Muslim Brothers arrested between the vote’s second and third rounds. Otterman states:

The Muslim Brotherhood has been formally banned in Egypt since 1954, but in reality, the Egyptian government has allowed it to operate within limits since the 1970s, keeping it in check with frequent arrests and crackdowns. A more open political atmosphere in 2005, due to both domestic and international pressure, led the government to grant the Brotherhood unprecedented freedom to campaign before this year’s parliamentary vote. While the group’s 150 candidates officially ran as independents, there was nothing secret about their Brotherhood affiliation. Candidates held rallies, hung posters with the Brotherhood’s name, and used its slogan, “Islam is the Solution.”

Did the open atmosphere continue throughout the vote?

No. Once voting started November 9, significant government repression of the group returned. More than 1,000 Brothers were arrested before the vote’s second and third rounds, and police blocked Brotherhood supporters from entering the polls in some districts, according to independent organizations monitoring the election. Brotherhood leaders also accused the government of changing the final count to lead to a victory for the ruling party candidate in seven districts, a concern echoed by independent monitors. More than 100 Egyptian judges signed a statement condemning “aggression and acts of thuggery by supporters of the ruling party against the judges while...police forces stood idle” (Otterman, S. 2005, ‘Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt’s Parliamentary Elections’, Council on Foreign Relations website, 1 December

http://www.cfr.org/publication/9319/muslim_brotherhood_and_egypts_parliamentary_elections.html – Accessed 26 June 2009 – Attachment 17).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine <http://www.google.com/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Egypt*, 19 September.
2. International Crisis Group 2008, *Egypt's Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?*, Middle East/North Africa Report no.76, 18 June.
3. Stacher, J. 2009, 'The Brothers and the Wars', *Middle East Report*, vol. 250, Spring <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/stacher.html> – Accessed 26 June 2009.
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15. el Magd, N. 2009, 'Egypt arrests 33 members of Muslim Brotherhood', *The National*, 17 May <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090517/FOREIGN/705169854/1002> – Accessed 26 June 2009.
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