

*This message from Ashraf Ibrahim in Mahkoum Tora prison was sent to, and translated into English by, Egyptian antiwar activists:*

A message from Prison

A Real Trial or a Hunger Strike until Death

On the 20th of March I was one of 20 thousand citizens who gathered in El Tahrir Square. I opened my eyes wide, trying to register the glorious scene of the youth and elderly from all political trends and groups joining in chanting slogans, singing and holding candles to recall, remind each other and live the passion of their commitment to their civilization.. In many different ways they joined to say: No to the American Aggression against Iraq.

Within that organized crowd my three-year-old daughter "Laila" was playing in a different way. I was thrilled to watch her discovery of the freedom enjoyed on that day by the people gathering in the square. For her this was more important and more interesting than tens of other toys.

It is then that I decided to record that rare moment using my small personal video camera. That was the beginning of the hardship that I have been living until this very moment. At the dawn of the 17th of April, State Security Forces broke into my house while I was away on a working trip outside Cairo. Without a permission from the prosecution, they confiscated my personal computer, the video camera and my personal papers including my driver's license, the lease contract of my apartment where my wife and daughter are living and the contract of another apartment, the installments of which I am still paying, and much more.

Then started a series of strange accusations such as going on to the websites of some human rights organizations and some satellite channels. I did not know that there was any law prohibiting this. Other accusations are still more ridiculous such as publishing pictures of demonstrations against the US aggression against Iraq; considering that the government itself has organized a demonstration for the same reason and broadcaster it on all Egyptian channels.. Live!!

Those are the charges I was accused of and which constituted the substance of the first sessions of my interrogations during the early days of my imprisonment.

Then, new developments took place, which partly explained the continuous extension of my imprisonment. I was made to know that my release is pending on my acceptance to testify that a list of names, prepared beforehand by State Security Intelligence, was present in Tahrir Square on the 20th of March. Otherwise I would remain in prison indefinitely. This would constitute jeopardy to my family and increases the likelihood that I might lose my job.

Maybe what strengthened my will and endurance is my knowledge that 200 Egyptian citizens have submitted a complaint to the Prosecutor General asking that they too be interrogated since they are partners in the accusation fabricated by the prosecution, namely: disclosure of human rights violations in Egypt. If anything, this accusation discloses the major confusion of our government, which establishes a National Council for Human Rights, while at the same time persecutes human rights activists.

I am calling upon the living conscience of all honorable and democratic citizens of my country.. upon all national, regional and international human rights organizations and institutions. I am writing from El

Mahkoum prison of Tora, where I share a cell with more than 40 prisoners, charged with different criminal charges.. In that cell, which I am not allowed to leave for more than one hour a day, my share of space is limited to an area of one and a half floor tiles.

I am writing to assert that I am ready to die struggling for the principles of freedom of opinion and expression and for my daughter's right to enjoy her simplest rights in a stable family and to finally see her Dad who has been "travelling" since 100 days.

It is therefore that I am making the following statement:

I shall present in front of the prosecution once again on the 30th of July 2003. If I do not receive a referral to court or an order of release I shall start an open hunger strike on the same day.

Ashraf Ibrahim

Tora prison, 21 July 2003