



**INTERNATIONAL PEN
WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE
DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER**

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Egypt

**Ibrahim Issa and Sahar Zaki
Editor and Journalist**

Ibrahim Issa and Sahar Zaki, editor and journalist respectively of the opposition weekly *Al-Dustur*, were each sentenced to one year in prison on 26 June 2006 by a court in the village of Al-Warrak, near Cairo, for ‘insulting the President’ and ‘spreading false or tendentious rumours’. They were charged after they reported on a legal case against President Mubarek. The charges were brought by the so-called ‘ordinary people of al-Warrak’, who were reportedly offended by an article published in *Al-Dustur* on 25 April 2005. The article in question reported on a lawsuit brought by a man from Al-Warrak who accused President Mubarak of unconstitutional conduct and ‘wasting foreign aid’ during the privatisation of state-owned companies. The journalists remain free on bail pending appeal.

Al Dustur is well known for its outspoken criticism of the government, and Ibrahim Issa has been banned from publishing many times. *Al Dustur* was banned in February 1998 after it published a letter allegedly from the armed Islamist group the Gama’a Islamiyya. Issa tried unsuccessfully to register a new newspaper nine times over the next seven years, until the ban on *Al Dustur* was finally lifted in 2005 after Issa was approached to edit the newspaper of the opposition party Al-Ghad. Issa is also a novelist, and his novel *Maqtal Al-Rajul Al-Kabir (The Assassination of the Big Man)* was banned in 1999.

Article 179 of Egypt’s Penal Code criminalises “insulting the president”, and Article 102 (bis) allows for the detention of ‘whoever deliberately diffuses news, information/data, or false or tendentious rumours, or propogates exciting publicity, if this is liable to disturb public security, spread horror among the people, or cause harm or damage to the public interest’. In February 2004 President Hosni Mubarak pledged to amend the 1996 Press Law and abolish prison sentences for press offenses, but to date no action has been taken to this effect and there are currently at least seven cases known to PEN of journalists facing prison sentences in Egypt for their reporting.

International PEN Writers in Prison Committee protests the prison sentence handed down to to journalists Ibrahim Issa and Sahar Zaki, and reminds President Mubarak of his pledge to end the imprisonment of journalists for press offenses in February 2004. PEN urges that immediate action is taken to repeal the laws that criminalise defamation in Egypt.

Appeals to:

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