

Free Kareem Coalition
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

US SECRETARY OF STATE MUST ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN EGYPT

International Coalition Calls on Dr. Rice to Discuss Release of Jailed Blogger with
President Hosni Mubarak

March 23, 2007

NEW YORK—US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will arrive today in Egypt in the midst of international furor over continuing human rights abuses occurring in the close US ally. During her visit, she will be meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Aswan for face-to-face talks on regional issues.

The Free Kareem Coalition calls on Secretary Rice to use this opportunity to officially insist on the release of blogger Abdul Kareem Nabil Soliman. Soliman, better known by his Internet handle ‘Kareem Amer’, was sentenced just one month ago to four years in prison for writings on his blog, in which he promoted women’s rights and criticized extremism in Islam.

Kareem, a 22-year-old law student, was expelled by the religious Al-Azhar University over his writings, and was then arrested last November on charges of “insulting the president of Egypt” and “disdain of Islam”. While Kareem is the first Egyptian to be prosecuted for Internet-based journalism, his imprisonment sets a dangerous precedent. Amnesty International has called his case “a further erosion of free expression in Egypt,” and Human Rights Watch has also called for his immediate release.

Soliman’s sentence has generated international condemnation. To honor his integrity in protecting free speech, Index on Censorship recently awarded Kareem their 2007 Hugo Young Award for Journalism, and English PEN has granted him honorary membership. The US State Department has previously issued statements expressing concern about Kareem’s conviction and sentence. Additionally, US Congressmen Barney Frank and Trent Franks have issued a bipartisan letter strongly encouraging the Egyptian government to set Kareem Amer free. European parliamentarians have also called for Abdul Kareem’s unconditional release. However, no action is being taken by the Egyptian government to correct the Alexandria court’s mistake.

With his appeal denied, Amer’s only hope is a pardon from President Hosni Mubarak. “We have worked on raising awareness around the world about Kareem’s imprisonment. Secretary Rice is in a unique position to help secure his release, if only she will act,” said Andrew Perraut, London Coordinator of the Free Kareem Coalition.

The US State Department has not announced plans for Rice to discuss human rights during her trip. “We implore the Secretary to ask President Mubarak to correct the mistake made by the prosecutor and court, and to pardon Kareem Amer. Egypt must live up to its own promise to respect the basic rights of its own citizens,” Perraut added.

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