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## **EGYPT | CSW Expresses Concern at Sentencing of NGO Workers**

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is deeply concerned at the sentencing of 43 NGO employees, who were convicted of working in Egypt illegally by the Cairo Criminal Court on June 4. The employees, who include foreigners, received sentences ranging from one year to five years, though many were convicted in absentia.

The trial of the 43 defendants began on Feb. 5, 2012. The charges against them included conducting research, political training, surveys and workshops without licenses, training political parties and groups, and managing unlicensed branches of NGOs. Many fled the country prior to being sentenced, although a few remained to continue their work, and were present for the sentencing.

Twenty-seven people received five-year sentences in absentia. Five individuals, who had attended court, were sentenced to two years, and 11 others were given one-year suspended sentences. The court also granted the option of paying roughly \$140 to secure a three-year deduction in the five-year sentences.

In addition to the individual sentences, the court moved to shut down five NGOs and confiscated their funds and documentation. The International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ), US-based Freedom House (FH), and the German Konrad Adenauer Stiftung organization were all charged with "receiving illicit foreign funds and operating without a license".

The verdict of the Cairo Criminal Court has been condemned by human rights organizations and by key international actors, including U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, and German Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle. It is likely to put a further strain on Egypt's relations with foreign donors and will add to concerns regarding Egypt's new draft NGO laws, which have been widely condemned for giving the state excessive control over the

activities of NGOs and subjecting them to more stringent investigations and reporting of activities.

Mervyn Thomas, CSW's Chief Executive Officer said, "We are deeply concerned at these disproportionate sentences, which constitute a threat to civil society and coincide with the emergence of draft NGO laws that, if promulgated in their current form, will severely restrict freedom of association and freedom of expression at a time when democracy in Egypt is in a precarious state. CSW calls for the urgent review of these sentences and of the draft NGO laws, and for the Egyptian authorities to ensure that prospective legislation and state practice advance the rule of law and line up with international human rights statutes to which Egypt is party."