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WORLD news

EGYPT

Two men who allegedly created Web sites offering to have gay sex for money were sentenced to a year in prison Dec. 18 by the Boulaq misdemeanor court.

Engineering student Sherif Abu Bakr and science student Khaled Mohamed al-Sawi, both in their early 20s, were charged with indecency for posting nude pictures of themselves and offering sexual services. However, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission thinks the men might have been framed.

"People suspected of homosexuality are picked up and accused of prostitution," the group's Scott Long said. "Police use informers and the Internet to entrap victims.... These latest convictions are deeply suspect."

This comes in the wake of the sentences handed down by Cairo's Emergency State Security Court, which ordered 23 men Nov. 14 to serve between one and five years of hard labor for allegedly engaging in gay sex. They were rounded up at a gay bar and elsewhere and charged with obscene behavior and contempt for religion.

International human rights groups denounced the prosecutions as bogus. Amnesty International has adopted 22 of the men as prisoners of conscience.

Meanwhile, 15-year-old Mohamed Abdel Fatah, who had been tried in juvenile court separate from the 23 men, was released from prison Dec. 18 after his sentence was reduced from three years to six months and he was given credit for time served. He had been convicted of practicing sexual immorality, but an appeals court decided he was unable to distinguish "right from wrong."

"This is a tremendous victory for Mohamed and his family," Long said. "Maybe the Egyptian government is starting to get the message that the arrest and torture of people for their presumed homosexuality must stop."

IRELAND

The Irish police force, the Garda Síochána, is creating a network of 14 liaison officers to the sexual minorities community. They will push for improved reporting and investigation of crimes affecting gay men and lesbians, according to the *Irish Times*.

The officers will be based in Dublin, Cork and Galway. As part of the effort to build confidence between the cops and gays, the police's Garda Band will perform in joint concert with the gay choir Gloria this April at the National Concert Hall.

UNITED KINGDOM

Police in Birmingham, England, have launched a \$68,000 project to improve communication with gays and encourage them to report crimes. Operation Pink Shield also will examine drug use and social problems in the gay community, according to the *Birmingham Post*.

The money was provided by the force's Partnership Development Fund and Building Safer Communities project. "This is a starting point and sends a clear message to gay people that police will treat homophobic crime seriously and each incident will be fully investigated," said Sgt. Harvinder Khatkar of the Acocks Green precinct.

The new chairwoman of the United Kingdom section of Amnesty International is lesbian author, playwright and activist Linda

Wilkinson. She has worked with the organization in other capacities for five years.

According to the British lesbian magazine *Diva*, Wilkinson was instrumental in the successful campaign to free Amnesty's first lesbian prisoner of conscience, Mariana Cetiner of Romania. Last September, she and her partner, Carol Budd, were the first lesbian couple to sign London's largely symbolic Partnerships Register.



Linda Wilkinson (right) celebrates with her partner, Carol Budd, and London Mayor Ken Livingstone (center)

Britain's first and only gay radio station, LBH, is a success with a regular audience of 300,000 listeners after one year in business. And the straight-owned and -operated company doesn't even play the Village People or Abba, London's *Telegraph* noted.

"Fifteen, even 10 years ago it would have been too early for something like this," founder Torquil Riley-Smith said. "There would have still been a taboo attached. But now, gay culture is firmly in the mainstream."

ARMENIA

The former Soviet republic of Armenia will decriminalize homosexuality to satisfy the Council of Europe, which it recently joined. But activists say the move will do little to improve



Irish cops police the Dublin St. Patrick's Day Parade

the plight of the nation's gays.

"It'll be two generations before the environment starts to change," said Mikael Danielian, chairman of the Armenian Helsinki Association, an independent human rights group. "Society believes homosexuals are criminals."

THE NETHERLANDS

A Muslim cleric who told television viewers that homosexuality is a sickness was charged with promoting discrimination Dec. 5. He could be jailed for up to one year.

Imam Khalil el Moumni said: "Homosexuality is damaging for Dutch society. Homosexuality isn't limited to people with this disease. It can spread."

About 1,900 same-sex couples have gotten married since the Netherlands became the first nation in the world to open regular marriage to gays last April, the Central Statistics Office reported Dec. 12.