

Egypt detains leading MB members

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Egypt's opposition Muslim Brotherhood reported that Egyptian police detained three leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood on Sunday, including a member of the group's executive Guidance Council

Muslim Brotherhood is Egypt's most powerful opposition group, and seeks an Islamic state through democratic means. It is one of the largest and oldest Islamist groups in the world, and has eschewed violence for decades.

In a statement, the group said police detained Guidance Council member Abdel Moniem Aboul Fotouh, who is also the secretary-general of the Cairo-based Union of Arab Doctors.

Also held were Gamal Abdel Salam, who heads the Union's emergency relief committee, Fathi Lasheen, a retired judge, and Abdel Rahman al-Gamal, described by the group as an educator.

Egyptian interior ministry could not be reached for comment.

Abdel Salam was detained in December for close to two months after the Egyptian government accused him and two others of "forming a jihad group" linked to Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, charges the group dismissed as motivated by tensions between the Egyptian government and Hamas.

A lawyer for the Brotherhood said prosecutors had not yet charged the men, but said he believed the detentions were connected to an ongoing crackdown motivated by what the government says is an attempt by the group to revive its international wing -- charges the Brotherhood denies.

Also on Sunday, a Cairo court ordered the release of 13 senior members of the group in a related case in which state prosecutors accused the men of laundering money gained through terrorism.

One of the men charged in that case was Osama Nasr el-Din, a member of the Guidance Council.

Muslim Brotherhood lawyer Abdel Moneim Abdel Maqsoud dismissed the allegations against them.

"The proof is that the court ordered the (13 Brotherhood members') release today at the first hearing," he said. The men have not yet been released.

The group won roughly a fifth of seats in the lower house of parliament in 2005, but authorities have since obstructed its efforts to further its electoral gains in more recent votes for municipal councils or parliament's upper house.

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