

## Jailed Muslim Brotherhood leaders accuse Mubarak government of politicizing army

Daily Star, Egypt

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First Published: October 9, 2007

CAIRO: Jailed leaders of the Islamic opposition group have for the first time accused the government of politicizing the army by using military tribunals to try its opponents, according to a statement released this week.

The members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who are all on trial in a military court on charges of money laundering and supporting terrorism, said that the army should be outside the political rivalry of the government and its opponents calling for reform.

“The armed forces belong to the Egyptian people and not to the ruling party. This party has no right to jeopardize the great stature of the armed forces by making them a part of political rivalries or an instrument to crackdown on its opponents,” said the statement faxed to the Associated Press.

The statement and its accusations of President Hosni Mubarak using the army for political purposes comes at a particularly sensitive time for Egypt as speculation is rife about the health of the 79-year-old leader and whether his son will succeed him.

While all of Egypt’s presidents since a 1952 military coup toppled the monarchy have hailed from the military, the institution, which is the largest military in the Arab world with half a million men, is still seen as neutral and held in high esteem.

Khalil El-Anani, a political analyst at Cairo’s International Politics Quarterly, believes the Brotherhood is trying to force a wedge between the army and the government at a particularly sensitive time.

“This is a dangerous game to try and incite the army, but it won’t work,” he said, maintaining that the military is firmly behind the current government.

Egypt began using military tribunals to try Islamist insurgents fighting to overthrow the government in the early 1990s because civil courts would not always convict suspects.

Starting in 1995, they began sending members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who have eschewed violence and participate parliamentary elections, to the military courts as well.

Forty members of the organization are currently on trial in front of such a tribunal, despite an earlier ruling by a civilian court that they should be tried by the civil legal system.

The trial is part of an ongoing government crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood, whose members hold almost 20 percent of the seats in the country’s parliament and pose the most significant challenge to Mubarak’s regime.

Human rights groups in Egypt and abroad have repeatedly condemned Egypt's policy of trying civilians before military courts, which usually issue harsh verdicts with no possibility of appeal. *Associated Press*