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## **The Daily Telegraph**

### **Blogger is jailed for four years**

By Hugh Miles in Cairo

AN EGYPTIAN who enraged his government with outspoken views on Islam and politics expressed in his internet diary was jailed yesterday amid an international outcry.

The 22-year-old former law student, whose own father has disowned him and called for his execution under Islamic law, was sentenced to four years by a court in Alexandria.

The convictions resulting from the views published on his weblog, sandmonkey, included counts for "spreading information disruptive of public order and damaging to the country's reputation"; "incitement to hate Islam" and "defaming the President of the Republic".

Abdelkareem Suleiman was also found guilty of criticising Al-Azhar University. He was expelled from the university last March after writing in his blog that the "professors and sheikhs at Al-Azhar who ... stand against anyone who thinks freely" would "end up in the dustbin of history".

The sentence, which was condemned by human rights groups, is widely seen as the latest attempt by the government to punish internet activism. The interior ministry recently established a new intelligence unit, called the department for confronting computer and internet crime, and new laws have made it easier for the police to shut websites deemed subversive.

Identification is now a requirement to use the internet in public places and state security issues proprietors with black lists of those forbidden from going online. The state-controlled press often accuses bloggers of defaming Egypt's reputation abroad or of being in the pay of foreign powers.

Seven bloggers were among dozens of people arrested last year during student demonstrations, but Suleiman was the first to be convicted. Blogging about Muslim-Christian riots that took place in Alexandria in October 2005, Suleiman wrote in typically provocative fashion: "Muslims have taken the mask off to show their true hateful face, and they have shown that they are at the top of their brutality and inhumanity."

Until two years ago there were still only about 30 blogs written in Egypt, which has a population of 80 million. Now more than 3,000 men and women can be found blogging in every major town and city.



