

Halawa trial is stalled for 19th time in Egypt

Mail Foreign Service

THE trial of jailed Irish citizen Ibrahim Halawa has been adjourned for the 19th time in an Egyptian court.

Mr Halawa, 21, has been in prison for more than three years after being detained in a mosque near Ramses Square in Cairo as the Muslim Brotherhood held a 'day of rage' over the removal of elected president Mohamed Morsi in August 2013.

The latest delay in the mass trial of almost 500 people is understood to have been ordered after judges said witnesses could not be called.

Foreign Affairs Minister Charlie Flanagan said he is deeply disappointed at the setback and con-



Still in jail: Ibrahim Halawa
cerned for Mr Halawa. 'The Government and the Department of Foreign Affairs and our embassy in Cairo will be continuing to monitor all developments in rela-

tion to Ibrahim Halawa's case and his welfare,' he said.

Ireland's Ambassador to Egypt, Damien Cole, was in court.

He said the judges indicated a 'clear desire' to progress the case despite the adjournment.

Amnesty International Ireland said Egypt continues to ignore its obligations under domestic and international law and that technical reviews of video footage from Ramses Square found no evidence against Mr Halawa, who is the son of prominent Dublin-based Muslim cleric Sheikh Hussein Halawa.

Amnesty director Colm O'Gorman said: 'We reiterate our call on the Egyptian authorities to drop all charges against Ibrahim and to order his immediate and unconditional release.'

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

We too can be renewed come spring

AS I write, a band of misty rain is falling outside. The grass is sodden and the naked trees look desolate. And yet, even on a morning that most people would describe as 'miserable', who can deny that spring is struggling to be born?

On Sunday, I awoke to a familiar sound, one that I haven't heard in many months. It was the sound of our beloved wood pigeons returning after winter. Their unmistakable cooing was definitive proof that the season of hope is finally upon us.

Spring: a season when the world begins to unveil its beauty. Already, the daffodils are up, even if they have yet to bloom. Soon, they shall open and smile, revealing the majesty of nature in its infancy.

Last week, as I strolled beneath a low spring sun, my eyes caught sight of the first cherry blossoms. The cherry blossom is always the first tree to show its splendour in spring. Almost overnight, the tender buds break open to display their delicate white flowers.

It is such a wondrous sight because you know it heralds a new sun. The white flower lasts but a few weeks before carpeting the soil beneath. To take it for granted is to miss the miracle of new life in all its wonder.

The rain may fall but it cannot stop the days from lengthening. As the winter shadows subside, we rise in the light. The heart soars as the sun slowly awakens from its seasonal slumber.

There is also the thrilling prospect of evenings without end. Each day, the light lingers a little longer. As it does, our gaze begins to drift outwards to the gardens and fields, the plants and the trees.

Apart from the cherry blossoms, most trees are still hesitating. It is as if they fear to open up in case they don't like what they find. But some have taken the risk and are beginning to dress for the new season.

A mantle of green baize tops the list of spring fashion. Extravagance is for summer, but in spring there is no hurry. Unlike us, trees know how to dress for every occasion.

The garden is not quite ready for heavy maintenance. We are in the 'birthing' process - that tentative phase when life, although yearning for freedom, can't quite leave the womb. Mother Earth still shields her young from the hazards of early spring.

Frost, snow, high winds and soaking soil threaten to ravage her offspring before they have had a chance to shine.

Only the daffodils seem intent on defying the last sting of the old season. Only they have the courage

to stand tall in the face of winter's dying roar.

And yet, all the signs of life are there: ripe buds, growing grass and trees that suggest it is only a matter of time. In nature, everything is only a matter of time, of waiting until the moment is right. Then, without being hurried or induced, the secrets of the season are exposed for all to savour.

Spring: a season of hope for those burdened by the darkness. As the wood pigeons coo, you get a sense of a mother gently serenading her unborn child.

It is not quite a chorus or a fanfare, but a muted hum that seeks to quench all fear for the future.

Spring rises and so do we. Somehow that muted hum also allays our fears. We look up and we look out at a world on the cusp of rebirth and renewal. And in that moment, we sense that we, too, are being renewed.

The beauty of spring can be seen all around you. But there is much more: it gives birth to new hopes, new aspirations and new longings for a brighter day. From winter's Golgotha, we have the chance to rise again with the birds and the blossoms.

Hope is such a fragile thing. How often we hear those distressing words: 'Don't get your hopes up.' Spring reminds us that, no matter how bleak our circumstances or dark our days, there is always hope.

WINTER is nature's tomb - cold, damp, dark and lifeless. In time, however, we discover that death is but a prelude to a glorious new day. With death, there is the promise of rebirth.

As I ponder our sad-looking garden, I see remnants of forgotten seasons in the sun. But then I look at the brave daffodils, the bright green baize and the cautious buds. I see all that and then I realise that hope springs eternal.

In nature, as in human life, there is always a fresh start that brings with it something bright and beautiful. Sooner or later, the darkness will subside and from the desolation there will arise a new creation. The muted hum will become a symphony which will cause the whole world to rise and dance.

Spring is our time to dance in hope. It is our time to soar with the birds and bloom with the shrubs. It is our time to see that no amount of darkness can suppress the light for long.

As I leave you, the rain is no longer falling. The clouds are finding it difficult to restrain the sun. For let us remember that, behind the clouds, the sun never ceases to shine.

There is always light if you look for it. There is always hope if you hold fast to it.

It is only ever just a matter of time.

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Irish Daily Mail

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