

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN EGYPT

The human rights situation in Egypt continues to deteriorate. This hearing is a welcome opportunity to explore the worsening human rights crisis in the country and raise the attention of the US government toward the declining Egyptian human rights record and the continued silencing of political opponents and civil society. Amnesty International believes it is currently more dangerous to criticize the government than at any time in Egypt's recent history. Egyptians living under President al-Sisi are treated as criminals simply for peacefully expressing their views. The security services are unrelentingly closing any remaining independent political, social and even cultural space. These measures have turned Egypt into an open-air prison for critics.

The past year has seen the arrests of Egyptians for making satirical videos, conducting interviews with opposition figures and offering legal assistance to human rights defenders. Thousands who have been detained have been subject to enforced disappearance, mass arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, excessive use of force and severe probation measures.

The authorities continued to severely restrict human rights organizations' and political parties' freedom of association. Constitutional amendments expanded the role of military courts in prosecuting civilians and undermined the independence of the judiciary. Since April 2020, the authorities have also introduced new repressive tactics to control cyber space by arresting at least 10 [women influencers](#) on charges of "indecentcy" and "violating family principles and values."

The Supreme State Security Prosecution, the lead investigating unit in most charges against human rights defenders, continues to absurdly accuse civil society activists with "terrorism"-related charges, to the point that they have even charged a Copt leader with being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Once these defendants are jailed, they face an unfair judicial system designed to prevent them from access to lawyers, family and even evidence used against them.

The Egyptian authorities continue to routinely use prolonged pre-trial detention to imprison and intimidate opponents. Prosecutors and judges often use vague and unfounded charges to arbitrarily detain critics, through regular renewals of detention without referral to trial, based only on the investigations of the National Security Agency (NSA), a specialized police force. In May, [nearly 1,600 pre-trial detention orders were extended](#) by prosecutors and courts without the detainees' presence, while lawyers were prevented from presenting their defense, in effect denying defendants the right to challenge the legality of their detention.

Prison authorities hold some perceived political opponents, activists, human rights defenders and others deprived of their liberty in connection to political cases and terrorism-related charges in particularly cruel and inhumane conditions and deliberately deny them health care with the apparent purpose to punish dissent. On May 2, filmmaker Shady Habash died at Tora Investigations Prison caused by the lack of adequate healthcare. According to information available to Amnesty International, the prison doctor who examined Habash initially, was negligent and slow to respond in treating Habash and starting the procedure of moving him to an outside hospital for specialized treatment, despite knowing that Shady was suffering from alcohol poisoning. Among the many who have died in custody are dual Egyptian-American nationals, such as Mohammed Qassem, who died in January 2020 following a hunger strike protesting his unfair trial.

Finally, authorities also have targeted Egyptian-Americans living abroad, attempting to silence their political criticism here in the United States. This includes the arrest of US citizen Mohamed Soltan's relatives in Egypt after he filed a civil suit against Egypt's former prime minister in an apparent effort to undermine any attempts at seeking truth and justice against the Rabaa killings.

The Sisi government does all this with a sense of impunity that mocks both those in Egypt and the international community who desire to see an Egyptian society built on respect for human rights and dignity. The US government has, while not entirely turning a blind eye to the mounting human rights violations, has failed to hold the Sisi government accountable. In fact, in some cases, US actions have enabled some of the same violations it documents in its annual Department of State Human Rights report. This must change.

During the hearing, you will hear about numerous individuals who have bravely spoken out against political and human rights abuses and paid the price with arrest and detention. Others faced the same fate simply for speaking out on controversial social issues, such as sexual assault. Here are several individuals Amnesty International would like to highlight:

In August, exiled **Bahey el-Din Hassan**, one of the founders of the Egyptian human rights movement, was sentenced to prison for 15 years on fabricated charges related to "insulting the judiciary" and "disseminating false news," under Egypt's penal code on crimes against state security and the draconian 2018 cybercrime law. The trial, held in absentia, once again showed how Egyptian officials are criminalizing free speech and intolerant of critical views.

In June 2019, **Ibrahim Ezz El-Din**, a housing rights researcher with an Egyptian NGO, was arrested by security forces from a street near his house in Moqattam, Cairo, and forcibly disappeared. He is one of many examples of how Egyptian security forces use enforced disappearances as a tool against political activists and protesters, including students and children. He remains in pre-trial detention. During detention, he has been tortured and denied care for several health issues, and his health has significantly deteriorated.

Alaa Abed El-Fattah, political activist and software engineer who rose to prominence during the 2011 uprising, was rearrested on absurd charges of spreading false news and joining an illegal organization in September 2019. He was one of more than 2,300 people arrested on similar charges following large peaceful protests in that month. At the time of his arrest, he had completed an unjust five-year prison sentence for participating in a peaceful protest in 2013 and did not participate in the 2019 protests because as part of his probation he was spending up to 12 hours a day at Dokki police station. His sister **Sanaa Seif** was recently detained while she and her family attempted to make a complaint to the Public Prosecution about an assault she suffered in front of Tora prison.

In February 2020, airport immigration officers arbitrarily arrested and tortured human rights defender **Patrick Zaki George** at 4:30 am upon his arrival at Cairo airport on charges including "disseminating false news", "inciting to protest" and "incitement to violence and terrorist crimes". In detention, National Security Agency officers questioned and tortured him before he appeared in front of the prosecutor the following day.

In July 2019, security forces stormed the house of **Ramy Shaath**, a political activist, who has played an instrumental role in co-founding several secular political movements in Egypt, including the El-Dostour party, a political party founded by Mohammad ElBaradei in 2012. He has remained in pre-trial detention for more than a year. Amnesty International believes he is being detained for his peaceful political activities. He recently has been added to the large HOPE case in which a large number of human rights activists have been accused without public evidence of being part of a terrorist organization.

These and thousands of other activists have courageously stood up for their beliefs in hopes of working toward an Egyptian society that is based on respect for human rights. They need our assistance. The Egyptian government's silencing of civil society means these activists no longer have any space to bring effective change. What is required that the international community hold the Egyptian government accountable for their abuses.

Recommendations

Amnesty International USA recommends that the United States take the following actions in order to hold President Sisi of Egypt and his government accountable for egregious human rights violations:

- Suspend all US arms sales to Egypt.
- Release all those detained for peacefully expressing their opinions or for defending human rights or carrying out their work or "influencing" on social media.
- Egyptian authorities must end the crackdown on dissent and immediately and unconditionally release all those detained for peacefully expressing their opinions, defending human rights or participating in political life, and to ensure that all others held in pre-trial detention are able to challenge the legality of their detention or be released.
- We further call on the Egyptian authorities to hold an investigation into the circumstances of those who died in custody and their conditions of detention including access to health care.

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