

Advocacy dossier

Ezzat Ghoneim

عزت غنيم

Imprisoned (serving sentence) **Egypt**

Ezzat Ghoneim, a lawyer who led the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, which documented enforced disappearances, was himself disappeared in 2018 and later tried on terrorism-related charges before an emergency court. He is serving a 15-year sentence imposed on 5 March 2023, which cannot be appealed.

01
The case at a glance

Ezzat Ghoneim, a lawyer who led the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, which documented enforced disappearances, was himself disappeared in 2018 and later tried on terrorism-related charges before an emergency court. He is serving a 15-year sentence imposed on 5 March 2023, which cannot be appealed.

Status **Imprisoned (serving sentence)**	Arrested **13 Sep 2018**	Country **Egypt**

Sentence Fifteen years in prison (Emergency State Security Court, 5 March 2023, case 1552/2018); not open to appeal.

Charges
Affiliation with a terrorist organisation
Providing financial support to a terrorist organisation
Distributing materials in furtherance of a terrorist group
Using social media to spread false information
Inciting citizens to commit terrorist acts
Defamation
Joining an illegal group

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Ezzat Ghoneim immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

04 Immediately lift the travel ban imposed on Ezzat Ghoneim and on any family members affected by the same order.

05 Immediately unfreeze the personal and organisational accounts of Ezzat Ghoneim.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Asset freeze UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 13

Criminalisation of solidarity International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 21, 22
UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 5

Denial of legal counsel International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)

Enforced disappearance International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 9, 16

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

Prolonged pretrial detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9(3)

Travel ban International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 12

Trial before an exceptional court International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

How the case unfolded

1 March 2018

Arrest

Detained by State Security in Cairo

State Security officers detained Ezzat Ghoneim in Cairo. He was added to State Security case no. 441/2018, accused of spreading false news and joining a banned group, and questioned without a lawyer.

9 May 2018

Pretrial detention renewed

Detention renewed for 15 days

The State Security Prosecution renewed Ezzat Ghoneim's detention for 15 days pending investigation in case no. 441/2018.

4 September 2018

Release on bail ordered

Court orders conditional release

The Giza Criminal Court ordered Ezzat Ghoneim's release with precautionary measures in case no. 441/2018. Al Haram police station did not carry out the order, saying it was awaiting instructions from the National Security Agency.

13 September 2018

Start of enforced disappearance

Police claim release; family cannot locate him

Ten days after the court order, police officers informed Ezzat's wife that he had been released. He did not return home, and his whereabouts became unknown.

November 2018

Other act

UN Working Group finds his detention arbitrary

In Opinion No. 82/2018, adopted at its session of 19 to 23 November 2018 and published in April 2019, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found his detention arbitrary under categories I, II, III and V, noting that the government had not replied, and called for his immediate release and reparations.

9 February 2019

Reappearance in custody

Reappears and is ordered into pretrial detention

After nearly five months of enforced disappearance, Ezzat Ghoneim reappeared and a judge ordered his pretrial detention until the end of the investigation in case no. 441/2018.

28 July 2019

Charge filed

Added to a new case, no. 1118/2019

After his release was ordered in case no. 441/2018, he was added to a new case, no. 1118/2019, on a charge of joining a terrorist group.

29 May 2021

Charge filed

Investigated in case no. 1552/2018, the ECRF case

He was investigated in case no. 1552/2018, the case against the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms.

23 August 2021

Referral to trial

Referred to Emergency State Security Court

The State Security Prosecutor referred Ezzat Ghoneim to trial before the Emergency State Security Criminal Court on charges including affiliation with a terrorist organisation, financing terrorism, and using ECRF's social media to spread false information.

5 March 2023

Conviction

Sentenced to 15 years by the Emergency State Security Court

5 March 2023

Final judgment

Emergency court verdict, not open to appeal

Verdicts of the Emergency State Security Court cannot be appealed, so the sentence was final when issued.

5 March 2023

Context

Placed on Egypt's terrorist list

All 29 people convicted in the case, including him, were placed on Egypt's terrorist list, which brings asset seizure and a travel ban.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked against current sources. Ezzat Ghoneim remains in prison serving the 15-year sentence imposed by the Emergency State Security Court on 5 March 2023, which cannot be appealed; no pardon or release has been reported, and his co-defendant Hoda Abdel-Moneim also remains in detention.

Background and Work

Ezzat Ghoneim is a human rights lawyer whose practice centred on the right to a fair trial and the documentation of enforced disappearances. In 2014, he took the helm of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, an organisation that rapidly became one of Egypt's most visible legal-defence groups during a period of sweeping crackdowns on dissent.

ECRF provided legal representation to detainees, tracked cases of arbitrary arrest and disappearance, and published reports on torture, medical negligence, and due-process violations inside Egypt's sprawling detention system. The organisation's work brought it into direct confrontation with State Security, which regards independent human rights monitoring as a threat to national security.

Arrest and Enforced Disappearance

On 1 March 2018, State Security officers detained Ezzat Ghoneim in Cairo, and he was added to State Security case no. 441/2018 on charges of spreading false news and joining a banned group. He was held pending investigation, and prosecutors renewed his detention at intervals over the following months. On 4 September 2018, the Giza Criminal Court ordered his release with precautionary measures.

The police station in Al Haram, where he was held, refused to execute the release order. Officers told his family they were awaiting instructions from the National Security Agency. On 13 September 2018, ten days after the court order, police informed his wife that Ezzat had been released. He did not come home. His family had no information about his location, and the authorities denied any role in his disappearance.

Ezzat Ghoneim remained disappeared for nearly five months. On 9 February 2019, he reappeared and a judge ordered his pre-trial detention. The pattern, judicial release followed by re-detention or disappearance, had by that time become a documented tactic used against lawyers, journalists, and activists in Egypt.

Prolonged Pre-Trial Detention and Charges

His detention at first continued in case no. 441/2018. In July 2019, after his release was ordered in that case, he was added to a new case, no. 1118/2019, on a charge of joining a terrorist group, and in 2021 he was investigated in case no. 1552/2018, the case against ECRF. Prosecutors renewed his detention every 45 days, a practice that Egyptian law permits for up to two years but which is frequently extended through the opening of new investigations.

He faced initial charges of defamation and joining an illegal group. In May 2018, the State Security Prosecutor renewed his detention for an additional

15 days pending further investigation. The charges evolved over time. On 23 August 2021, the State Security Prosecutor referred him to trial before the Emergency State Security Criminal Court on charges of affiliation with a terrorist organisation, providing financial support to that organisation, distributing materials in furtherance of its aims, and using ECRF's social media accounts to spread false information and incite citizens to commit terrorist acts.

Detention Conditions

The prison where Ezzat Ghoneim is held now is not publicly confirmed. Conditions in Egyptian prisons, particularly for those held on political or security-related charges, are marked by overcrowding, restricted family visits, and limited access to medical care. Information about Ezzat's health and treatment inside the facility remains sparse, a common feature of cases involving State Security prosecutions.

Legal Proceedings

The referral to an Emergency State Security Criminal Court represents a significant escalation. Egypt reactivated its emergency courts in 2017, granting them jurisdiction over a broad range of offences deemed to threaten national security. Verdicts issued by these courts are final and cannot be appealed, except through a process of ratification by the president, who has the discretion to confirm, reduce, or annul sentences.

The charges against Ezzat Ghoneim criminalise his human rights work under the rubric of terrorism. The allegation that ECRF's social media activity constitutes incitement reflects a broader legal strategy in which documentation and advocacy are reframed as support for proscribed groups. The case has been described by observers as emblematic of the systematic targeting of Egypt's remaining independent human rights infrastructure.

International and Regional Response

In Opinion No. 82/2018, published in April 2019, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found his detention arbitrary and called for his immediate release. Human rights organisations in Egypt and internationally have called for Ezzat Ghoneim's release, citing the arbitrary nature of his detention, the due-process violations throughout his case, and the use of terrorism charges to silence legitimate human rights work. His prolonged pre-trial detention, the enforced disappearance that preceded his reappearance in court, and the referral to an emergency tribunal all constitute serious breaches of international fair-trial standards.

On 5 March 2023 the Emergency State Security Court sentenced him to 15 years in prison, together with 28 other defendants convicted in the case, and all of them were placed on Egypt's terrorist list. The verdict cannot be appealed; only the president can confirm, reduce or annul it. His detention has had a chilling effect on the wider community of Egyptian human rights lawyers, many of whom have faced similar patterns of arrest, disappearance, and prosecution.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/ezzat-ghoneim/

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