

Advocacy dossier

Negad El Borai

نجاد البرعي

At liberty **Egypt**

Lawyer and founder of the United Group, specialising in individual freedoms and property law. Charged in Egypt's foreign-funding case; subjected to five interrogations, travel ban, and asset freeze before charges were dropped in August 2021.

01
The case at a glance

Lawyer and founder of the United Group, specialising in individual freedoms and property law. Charged in Egypt's foreign-funding case; subjected to five interrogations, travel ban, and asset freeze before charges were dropped in August 2021.

Status **At liberty**	Country **Egypt**
Sentence No trial; charges dropped on 30 August 2021, with the investigative judge announcing that travel bans and asset freezes were removed. Case 173 was closed on 20 March 2024.	
Charges Receiving illegal foreign funding Operating without legal permission	

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Confirm publicly that no charge, restriction or proceeding remains against Negad El Borai in connection with this case.

02 Guarantee that Negad El Borai can continue peaceful human rights work without surveillance, summons or further reprisal.

03 Immediately lift the travel ban imposed on Negad El Borai and on any family members affected by the same order.

04 Immediately unfreeze the personal and organisational accounts of Negad El Borai.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Asset freeze UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 13

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

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

03

How the case unfolded

January 2014

Defender activity

Resignation from National Council

El Borai resigned from Egypt's National Council for Human Rights in protest over the body's inconsistent response to documented human rights abuses.

21 May 2015

Interrogation

First interrogation

An investigative judge at North Giza Court questioned El Borai about his work drafting an anti-torture bill, following a complaint by the Supreme Judicial Council that also accused him of chairing an illegal organisation.

3 March 2016

Charge filed

Charged in foreign-funding case

El Borai was questioned for more than three hours by an investigative judge at North Giza Court and charged with receiving illegal foreign funding, establishing and running an illegal group, inciting disobedience of state authorities, disturbing public order and spreading false news. He was released on bail pending investigation.

17 May 2016

Summons

Fifth round of interrogation

An investigative judge summoned El Borai to a fifth interrogation session set for 17 May 2016. That session was postponed and he was questioned on 5 June 2016, when the judge set another date for him to present his defence documents.

26 January 2017

Travel ban imposed

Travel ban imposed

Airport security prevented El Borai from boarding his flight to Jordan after his name appeared on a prosecutor-compiled travel-ban list.

31 July 2017

Appeal outcome

Court upholds denial of recognition to United Group

On appeal, an administrative court upheld the Social Affairs Ministry's refusal to recognise United Group, the law firm where Negad El Borai is senior partner, under the 2002 associations law. The ruling barred the firm from holding awareness-raising activities and workshops on that law, citing a project funded by Australian Aid.

30 August 2021

Case update

Charges dropped

The investigative judge authorised by the Cairo Court of Appeal dropped all charges against El Borai and three co-defendants in the foreign-funding case.

30 August 2021

Travel ban lifted

Judge's decision lifts travel ban and asset freeze

In the press release announcing the end of the investigation against Negad El Borai and the other defenders in Case 173 of 2011, the investigative judge said the travel bans and asset freezes against them and their organisations were removed. Amnesty International noted that it was unclear whether the Ministry of Interior had taken the names off its travel ban list.

20 March 2024

Context

Foreign-funding case closed

The authorities announced the closure of Case No. 173 of 2011, the foreign-funding case, and said that travel bans had been lifted for 29 of the 31 people still affected.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked against current sources. Negad El Borai is free: the investigative judge dropped the foreign funding case against him on 30 August 2021 and announced that travel bans and asset freezes were removed, and the authorities announced the closure of Case 173 on 20 March 2024. Magdy Abdel Hamid, Hossameldin Ali and Azza Soliman were cleared in the same decision, and Amnesty International also named Esraa Abdel Fattah among those it covered.

Background and Work

Negad El Borai is a prominent figure in Egypt's human rights and legal-reform community. A lawyer by training, he served as head of the legal unit at United Group, a law firm focused on individual freedoms, property rights, and rule-of-law advocacy. He founded and led the Group for Democratic Development and served as secretary general of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, one of the country's oldest independent human rights bodies.

El Borai also worked as a columnist for Al-Shorouk, a widely circulated independent newspaper, where he wrote on freedom of expression, assembly, and association. He was appointed to Egypt's National Council for Human Rights, a state-affiliated body meant to advise on rights policy, but resigned in January 2014, citing the council's failure to respond consistently to documented abuses during a period of escalating repression.

He was involved in drafting model legislation to criminalise torture, drawing on years of documentation work with survivors and civil society partners. That draft became a focal point of state scrutiny.

The Foreign-Funding Case and Repeated Interrogations

In 2011 Egyptian authorities opened Case No. 173, an investigation targeting civil society organisations on allegations of receiving unauthorised foreign funding and operating without proper registration. The case remained dormant for several years before resurfacing in 2015 as part of a broader crackdown on independent organisations and their leaders.

El Borai was summoned for interrogation on 21 May 2015 by an investigative judge at North Giza Court. The questioning centred on his involvement in drafting anti-torture legislation and followed a complaint by the Supreme Judicial Council. He was called in again on 3 March 2016, questioned for more than three hours and charged with receiving illegal foreign funding, establishing and running an illegal group, inciting disobedience of state authorities, disturbing public order and spreading false news, then released on bail. A fifth session set for 17 May 2016 was postponed, and he was questioned again on 5 June 2016.

The repeated interrogations formed part of a pattern affecting more than thirty-seven organisations and dozens of defenders, many of whom faced overlapping charges and parallel restrictions.

Travel Ban and Asset Freeze

On 26 January 2017 El Borai arrived at Cairo International Airport to board a flight to Jordan.

Airport security prevented him from travelling after his name appeared on a list compiled by the investigating magistrate and the prosecutor general in connection with the foreign-funding case. The travel ban had been imposed without prior notice.

The ban was accompanied by an asset freeze affecting both his personal accounts and the institutional assets of United Group. Separately, on 31 July 2017 an administrative court upheld on appeal the Social Affairs Ministry's refusal to recognise United Group, barring the firm from holding workshops on the associations law.

Travel bans became one of the most common tools of restriction during this period, applied to more than a dozen defenders linked to the foreign-funding case, including Azza Soliman, Mozn Hassan, Hossameldin Ali, and others.

Case Closure and Lingering Restrictions

On 30 August 2021 the investigative judge authorised by the Cairo Court of Appeal to oversee Case No. 173 issued a decision dropping the charges against El Borai and three co-defendants: Azza Soliman, Magdy Abdel Hamid, and Hossameldin Ali. The decision also dropped charges against their respective organisations.

No trial took place; the charges were dropped. The decision also ordered the travel bans and asset freezes lifted, but further legal steps were needed to remove their names from official restriction lists and unfreeze their accounts. In March 2024 the authorities announced the closure of Case No. 173.

Context and Pattern

El Borai's case illustrates the use of prolonged investigation, asset control, and mobility restriction as forms of pressure that operate independently of judicial outcomes. The foreign-funding investigation served as the legal framework for measures that effectively paralysed civil society work, even in cases where no conviction was ever secured.

His resignation from the National Council for Human Rights in 2014 and his continued legal advocacy work during the period of investigation marked him as a defender unwilling to accommodate state narratives. The focus on the anti-torture draft law during interrogations underscored the state's sensitivity to documentation and legislative reform efforts that threatened to formalise accountability mechanisms.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/negad-el-borai/

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