Egypt | Rights Groups Call for Release of Detained Shi'a Muslims in Egypt, including Journalist Haidar Qandil

Joint Statements · Egypt · 12 August 2026

The undersigned organizations strongly condemn the arrest, and enforced disappearance, of at least 36 Shi'a Muslim in Egypt, including journalist Mohammed Haidar Qandil.

On 22 June 2026, Egyptian security forces arrested at least six Shi'a Muslims from their homes. Later that day, Qandil, who as a journalist had spent the day documenting the arrests of Egyptian Shi'a Muslims ahead of Ashura, was himself arrested outside the offices of Al-Dostor newspaper in Dokki, Giza, and taken to an undisclosed location. Security forces had also raided a place of worship in Cairo's Sayyida Zeinab district earlier that same day, but no arrests were made as the site was empty. Two days later, on 24 June, security forces conducted a second raid on another place of worship in the same district during a religious gathering, arresting more than 20 people.

The detainees were forcibly disappeared for more than 20 days without access to their families or lawyers. Their whereabouts were not disclosed during this period. Mohammed Haidar Qandil did not appear before the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) until 14 July 2026. The SSSP charged Qandil with leading a terrorist organization and financing it, while the others were charged with joining a terrorist organization. Out of the 36 individuals interrogated between 14 and 20 of July, the SSSP ordered the release of one detainee and mandated the detention of the remaining 35. On 27 and 28 July, the custody of 32 of these detainees was renewed pending further investigation.

We are particularly alarmed by reports that in its questioning the Supreme State Security Prosecution focused extensively on the detainees' Shi'a beliefs, their religious affiliation and their participation in religious gatherings. The timing of the arrests, immediately before and during Ashura commemorations, raises serious concerns that those detained were targeted because of their religious identity and their exercise of the rights to freedom of religion or belief, expression, and peaceful assembly.

The use of counterterrorism legislation against members of a religious minority and journalists for activities connected to their beliefs and worship or their right to freedom of expression leads to criminalizing the peaceful exercise of fundamental human rights.

Shi'a Muslims in Egypt regularly face restrictions on practicing their religious rites, particularly during Ashura. These restrictions have included in the past the repeated closure of Al-Hussein Mosque and preventing worshippers from accessing the shrine.

The Egyptian authorities have an obligation, under Article 64 of the Egyptian Constitution, to protect all individuals within its territory, irrespective of their religious identity. Peaceful practice of religious beliefs must never be treated as evidence of terrorism or grounds for persecution. We urge the Egyptian authorities to take immediate action to safeguard their rights and safety.

We call on the Egyptian authorities to:

- **Release all individuals detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of religion or belief, expression, association or assembly;**
- **In compliance with Article 70 of the Egyptian Constitution, the Egyptian authorities must respect press freedom and cease retaliating against journalists for their lawful right to report;**
- **Ensure that every detainee has immediate and confidential access to legal counsel, family members and any necessary medical care;**
- **Conduct an independent and transparent investigation into the reported enforced disappearances, incommunicado detention, denial of legal assistance and other human rights violations;**
- **Hold accountable any officials responsible for unlawful arrests, disappearances or mistreatment;**
- **Stop the use of exceptional judicial mechanisms, such as the State Security Prosecution circuits, Emergency State Security Courts, terrorism circuits, and military courts to investigate, prosecute, and sentence civilians.**
- **End the weaponization of counterterrorism measures against Egypt's religious minorities and journalists.**

Signatories:

- Minority Rights Group
- Egyptian Front for Human Rights
- Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
- Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
- Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF)
- Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
- Sinai Foundation for Human Rights
- REDWORD for Human Rights & Freedom of Expression
- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- Committee to Protect Journalists
- The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

- Egyptwide for Human Rights
- Refugees Platform in Egypt (RPE)
- Committee for Justice (CFJ)

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HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement · info@humena.org