Egypt: End Reprisals, Harassment and Threats Against Civil Society Leader Mostafa Fouad

Letter · Egypt · 30 June 2020

The undersigned civil society organisations call on Egyptian authorities to immediately end their harassment of Egyptian activist and Deputy Director of HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement, Mostafa Fouad.

To:
Mary Lawler, Special Rapporteur on the Freedom on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, and Clément Voule, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Assembly;

Special Procedures Division
c/o OHCHR-UNOG
8-14 Avenue de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

Erika Ferrer
Head of Division – Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan (MENA)
CC: The European Union Delegation to Egypt

Ilze Brands Kehris
Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights
c/o OHCHR-UNOG
New York, NY 10017,
United States

Maria Arena
MEP and Chair of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights
European Parliament

Re: Urgent Action – Call for Egyptian Authorities to End Reprisals, Harassment and Threats Against Civil Society Leader Mostafa Fouad

The undersigned civil society organizations requests support in joint calls for Egyptian authorities to immediately end their harassment of Egyptian activist and Deputy Director of HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement, Mostafa Fouad.

Since November 2019, Egyptian authorities have targeted the family of Fouad, who has been exiled

since December 2017, following the release of the 'Unmask Them' campaign in January 2019. The campaign aimed to expose those responsible for human rights violations and attacks against civil society, as well as calling upon authorities to repeal Law No. 70 of 2017 Law of Associations and Other Foundations Working in the Field of Civil Work that included severe civic space restrictions against civil society. The law has since been replaced by the Law on Regulating the Work of Civil Associations, or Law No. 149 of 2019, and includes continued patterns of infringements on the rights to freedom of association in Egypt. Civil society actors including those in exile frequently face reprisals, intimidation and arbitrary arrest for their human rights work.

For his human rights advocacy, Fouad's family still in Egypt have faced continuous harassment at the hands of the authorities. On 26 April 2020, the National Security force forcefully entered the home of Fouad's parents in Cairo and informed his mother that she had been summoned to the National Security headquarters. The purpose of this summons was to interrogate her about Fouad and his work. Following their compliance with the summons the next day, Fouad's parents were informed to return two days later. This happened again on 29 April 2020 when they were again told to return two days later.

On the third visit, Fouad's parents were taken for interrogation, which focused on his human rights activities abroad, and his role in establishing networks for Egyptian activists living abroad. His parents were further questioned about his international human rights advocacy focused on the repression in Egypt. Authorities also asked about Fouad's connection to well-known Egyptian human rights defenders, such as Bahy El-Din Hassan, and the source of HuMENA's funding, whether he was sending them money, and how. Authorities were able to attain the contact details of Fouad and threatened to detain his brother, Mahmoud who is living in Egypt with his wife and two children.

This is not the first time authorities threaten Fouad's family. Following his move into exile, starting on 17 March 2018, his family faced frequent raids, harassment and intimidation by officials who provided no warrants for the searches. During one such raid, on 3 April 2019, authorities entered the house, broke into his room and took his old laptop, books, papers and notebooks.

A few days after the interrogation, the person (money transfer agent) through whom Mostafa Fouad was sending money to his family in Egypt had been arrested and is facing accusations of financing terrorism. Furthermore, on 20 May 2020, Fouad's brother, Mahmoud, received a call from the National Security. He was informed to cooperate with authorities and divulge information on Mostafa's work or face arrest.

The situation is rapidly deteriorating for the family of Fouad, as the authorities continue their crackdown on dissenters for their human rights advocacy. Even for civil society activists in exile, like Fouad, the risk of reprisals against their families remains high as the regime attempts to silence critics, activists and organizations in Egypt and abroad.

We believe that international intervention to draw attention to the case would be beneficial for protection purposes, and as such, we request that your offices consider publishing recommendations or a statement, jointly or in an individual capacity, with focus on

1. Denouncing the intimidation and harassment of Mostafa Fouad and his family for his civil society work;
2. Calling for the immediate and unequivocal end to harassment and intimidation of Mostafa Fouad and his family; including threats of arrest against his brother Mahmoud Fouad;
3. Calling for the amendment of Law No. 149 of 2019 to reflect international best practice on protecting the rights to freedom of association, especially for human rights work; and
4. Urging authorities to desist from targeting civil society actors through false accusations of terrorism under the 2015 Anti-Terrorism law that includes amendments in 2020 that allow for capital punishment and life sentences for terror-related charges.

Signed,

1. Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)
2. Andalus Institute for Tolerance and anti-Violence Studies
3. Arab Foundation for Civil and Political Rights
4. Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE)
5. Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
6. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
7. Committee for Justice (CfJ)
8. Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)
9. Eswatini Justice and Peace Institute
10. Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Coalition (EHRDC)
11. EuroMed Rights
12. Freedom House
13. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
14. HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement (HuMENA Regional)
15. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
16. Innovation for Change – MENA Hub
17. League of African Bloggers and Cyber Activists for Democracy (AfricTivistes)
18. Maharat Foundation
19. Odhikar
20. Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedom (MADA)
21. People In Need
22. Project 189
23. Réseau des Organisations de la Société Civile pour l'Observation et le Suivi des Élections (ROSE) en Guinée.

24. Réseau Ouest africain des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (ROADDH/WAHRDN)
25. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
26. The Day After (TDA)
27. The Freedom Initiative

For any urgent queries, please contact:

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