Egypt | Egyptian Authorities Should Stop Targeting Minors Over Online Gaming Activity

Joint Statements · Egypt · 29 August 2025

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly condemn the Egyptian security services' targeting of minors for their digital activity through online gaming platforms. This alarming practice has resulted in children being arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, denied due process, and reportedly facing torture and other ill-treatment while in detention. These grave human rights violations contravene both Egypt's national laws and international standards, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention Against Torture.

Over the past year, Egyptian authorities have arrested at least 15 children between the ages of 12 and 17 and charged them with membership in a terrorist group based on their online gaming activity. These detentions raise serious concerns that the Egyptian security services are targeting minors and entrapping them through online gaming platforms and other activity online. The undersigned organizations are concerned that gaming platforms, most notably PUBG: Battlegrounds, are being used to promise minors in-game rewards in exchange for joining messaging groups or sharing content on social media that authorities later claim are linked to extremists.

Documented cases reveal a disturbing pattern of abuse against children. In all cases, the children were taken from their homes without explanation, and were forcibly disappeared for multiple days (and in some instances, for months) before resurfacing. They have all been charged under the same vague accusation, "being part of a terrorist group," without any evidence presented. Many of the children have not been brought to court for detention renewal hearings, in violation of their procedural rights. Alarmingly, thirteen of the children are currently being held in police stations alongside adult detainees, in clear violation of both Egyptian law and international legal standards on the treatment of minors. According to the Egyptian Child Law (PDF) No. 12 of 1996, as amended by Law No. 126 of 2008, Article 112 stipulates that children may not be detained, imprisoned, or incarcerated together with adults in the same facility.

One of these minors, Mohamed Emad, is a 17-year-old U.S. citizen who lives in Baltimore, Maryland. He was arrested without a warrant in August 2024 while he was visiting his family in Egypt for the summer. According to his family, Emad was playing PUBG when individuals contacted him through the game, offering in-game rewards in exchange for sharing content on his social media accounts. Egyptian police raided his mother's home and seized cameras, computers, and other equipment, and he was forcibly disappeared for 10 days. His lawyers have been denied access to any case files, and he remains in pretrial detention nearly a year after his arrest. Emad, despite being a minor, has been held at Banha Police Station with adults since he reappeared. He suffers from severe asthma

and has reportedly been denied proper medical care. His ongoing detention prevented him from graduating high school back home in the United States this past school year.

Another minor, a 13-year-old Egyptian whose name is being kept confidential at the family's request, was arrested in late January 2025 and subjected to enforced disappearance for nearly three months before reappearing in front of investigators in April. He is currently held at the Abu Atata Juvenile Care Facility in Giza, after Al-Marg police station reportedly refused to detain him due to his age. According to his family, the child had been playing PUBG when unknown individuals contacted him through the game and offered him in-game rewards, such as coins and followers in exchange for sharing extremist content. After becoming frightened, he blocked the contacts. He was arrested two days later.

The Egyptian authorities' arrests of minors for their digital activity raise serious concerns about their arbitrary detention and entrapment. Instead of receiving support, education, and psychological care, these children have been subjected to enforced disappearance, medical negligence, torture, and deprived of their rights. The undersigned organizations call for the immediate release of any Egyptian minor entrapped while playing video games online and demand a thorough and transparent investigation into the violations they have endured. Such treatment of children constitutes a grave abuse of power and must be addressed urgently, and those responsible must be held accountable.

Signatures:

1. Middle East Democracy Center (MEDC)
2. Andalus institute for Tolerance And Anti-violence Studies AITAS
3. Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)
4. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
5. Najda For Human Rights (NFHR)
6. Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF)
7. Sinai Foundation for Human Rights
8. REDWORD for Human Rights & Freedom of Expression
9. Refugees Platform In Egypt (RPE)
10. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
11. MENA Rights Group
12. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
13. Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
14. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
15. HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement

Published at https://humena.org/egypt-minors-online-gaming-rights-violations/
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