Egypt: UN experts call on government to stop targeting and retaliating against human rights lawyers

Joint Statements · Egypt · 13 June 2024

The undersigned organizations support the letter by five UN Special Rapporteurs, published on 19 May 2024, addressing the Egyptian government in regards to the ongoing targeting of human rights lawyers through the use of counter-terrorism legislation, resulting in their imprisonment or compelling them to stop their human rights activities. The letter addressed the targeting of Mohamed Issa Rajeh and Mahmoud Abdelmajeed Adel, two lawyers at the Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR), an independent NGO, who were criminally investigated by the Supreme Security State Prosecution in June 2023. The lawyers are being investigated over bogus charges stemming solely from their legitimate work, including documenting human rights violations, providing of legal aid, and cooperating with UN mechanisms.

The Special Rapporteurs further called on the Egyptian government to stop prosecuting and arbitrarily arresting lawyers, in line with the demands of UN experts and Egyptian rights organizations. The undersigned organizations emphasize that this targeting of the two lawyers represents intimidation and reprisal against their work to push back against human rights violations and cooperation with UN mechanisms.

On 20 March 2024, the UN Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders, on the independence of lawyers and judges, on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, sent the communication to the Egyptian government. The government has yet to respond.

The undersigned organizations reaffirm that the government’s targeting of the two lawyers is indicative of a well-documented practice of the Egyptian authorities. In 2017, Ibrahim Metwally, lawyer and founder of the League of the Families of the Forcibly Disappeared, was arrested before traveling to Geneva to attend a meeting with the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Metwally remains in prolonged pretrial detention to date. Lawyer Ezzat Ghoneim, founder and director of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, his colleague and fellow human rights lawyer Hoda Abdel Moneim, and others from the same organization, were arrested and prosecuted for their human rights work, and subsequently sentenced to prison by the State Security Emergency Court. In August 2018, the Fifth Terrorism Circuit Court in Cairo sentenced Egyptian human rights defender Bahey el-Din Hassan, director of the Cairo Institute for Human

Rights Studies (CIHRS), to 15 years in prison in absentia for statements made during a UN event.

The organizations further affirm that the Egyptian government's ongoing use of politically motivated prosecution and imprisonment is part of an ongoing campaign to suppress civil society and civic space. It suggests a clear disregard for human rights that contradicts official statements made in national and international forums. It further indicates the Egyptian government's relentless campaign to suppress the public sphere and besiege independent civil society.

The undersigned human rights organizations call for the immediate release of all lawyers and human rights defenders detained for defending human rights, providing legal aid to victims of human rights violations, or for cooperating with UN mechanisms. The authorities should also drop the charges against all those prosecuted, including the two EFHR lawyers, and quash convictions and sentences of those tried solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights.

Signatories:

- Egyptian Front for Human Rights
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
- Human Rights Watch
- Amnesty International
- Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression
- El Nadeem
- Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
- Committee for Justice
- Sinai Foundation for Human Rights (SFHR)
- Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- FairSquare
- FIDH- International Federation for Human Rights
- Refugees Platform in Egypt (RPE) منصة اللاجئين في مصر
- EgyptWide for Human Rights
- DAWN
- Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
- Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)
- The Legal Agenda
- MENA Rights Group
- Middle East Democracy Center
- EuroMed Rights

- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- REDRESS
- Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms
- AfricanDefenders
- The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
- Freedom House

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