Joint Statement: Rights Groups Alarmed by Inhumane and Life-Threatening Conditions in Egypt's Badr Prison

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We, the undersigned organizations, are profoundly concerned by the recent and rapid deterioration of conditions inside Egypt's Badr Rehabilitation and Correctional Center, according to testimonies from detainees' families. We are alarmed by recent reports of suicide attempts and a mass hunger strike in response to widespread power cuts in Badr 1 prison, which have subjected prisoners to dangerous and life-threatening conditions. We are also alarmed by the reports of an ongoing hunger strike in Badr 3 prison due to collective violations of detainees' rights. The undersigned calls on the government of Egypt to immediately meet the demands of hunger-striking detainees, address long-standing calls for transparency in and access to Egypt's prison system by independent human rights organizations and immediately and unconditionally release all those who are unjustly detained in the country.

On May 25, 2024, amidst an extreme heat wave and without warning, authorities shut off electricity to Badr 1 prison for eight days. Prisoners were immediately thrust into miserable, inhumane conditions, threatening their health and well-being. In addition to suffering excessive heat, prisoners were unable to use fans or warm up food provided by their families, and some detainees were trapped in their cells due to nonfunctioning automatic doors. Despite the power cut, however, surveillance cameras monitoring detainees continued to operate, as did the constant fluorescent lighting that causes well-documented ramifications to detainees' physical and mental health and contravenes international human rights obligations.

In the days following the power cut, prison authorities failed to adequately address the ensuing health crises, particularly affecting elderly detainees and individuals with medical conditions. In desperation, on May 29, dozens of political prisoners in Badr 1 launched a hunger strike, and some participants attempted suicide. On July 9, one hunger-striking detainee received news that his request to transfer his academic materials to his mother had been denied, and he attempted suicide. His mother, who bore witness to this incident while visiting him in detention, suffered a severe respiratory crisis and died two days later.

The electricity cut off in Badr 1 was just the latest in a series of compounding violations to detainees' rights in recent weeks and months, including restrictions on the amount of food that can be brought into the prison from family members, visitation policies preventing some detainees from seeing their children and grandchildren, and the arbitrary handcuffing of some detainees during recess and visitation.

Instead of addressing these concerns, which were clearly outlined by hunger striking detainees, prison authorities transferred approximately 50 detainees, including key individuals negotiating on behalf of the strikers, to the notorious Al-Minya prison. Some were later transferred from Al-Minya to Al Wadi El Gedid (New Valley) prison. Additionally, authorities have since transferred dozens more detainees from Badr 1 to prisons notorious for dire conditions, including Damanhour, Burj Al Arab, and Wadi El Natrun prisons. This further alienates and isolates detainees from their families, creating undue financial and logistical challenges.

In Badr 3 prison's second section, detainees also launched a hunger strike in late June in response to collective and egregious rights violations against them, including bans on visitation and recess time as well as inhumane treatment from prison officials. Some individuals have not been allowed visitation since the opening of the Badr prison complex in 2022.

These horrific conditions and continued abuses once again disprove the Egyptian government's claims that Badr prison is proof of improving prison conditions in the country. Prison authorities (including State Security Officer Ahmed Fikri, who is allegedly responsible for the torture of high-profile political detainees) continue to operate with absolute impunity and endanger the health and lives of hundreds of detainees.

We, the undersigned organizations, call on the Egyptian authorities to:

- Fulfill its obligations for the treatment of prisoners under the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and under Egypt's own laws;
- Allow greater transparency into the prison system and full access to independent and international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross;
- Address the concerns of hunger-striking protesters in Badr 1:
    - releasing all detainees held on pretrial detention for more than the two-year limit as outlined in Egyptian law; replacing prison administrators and officers in Badr 1 and holding to account those who have violated detainees' rights; allowing the Egyptian National Human Rights Council to visit the prison; and improving prison conditions for detainees and their families;
- Address the concerns of hunger-striking protesters in Badr 3:
    - allowing prisoners regular visitation in accordance with prison regulations; allowing prisoners regular access to recess time; ensuring humane treatment from prison officials; and allowing family members to provide detainees food once a week; and
- Immediately and unconditionally release all those detained on political charges.

Signatures:

1. Middle East Democracy Center (MEDC)
2. Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)

3. El Nadeem Center against Violence and Torture
4. Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
5. HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
6. Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
7. Refugees Platform In Egypt (RPE)
8. Sinai Foundation for Human Rights (Sinaifhr)
9. Cairo Institute For Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
10. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)

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