Egypt | Ongoing Harassment of Lina Attalah and Escalating Crackdown on Mada Masr and Independent Journalism in Egypt

Joint Statements · Egypt · 11 August 2025

The undersigned organizations condemn the ongoing judicial and security harassment of Mada Masr, one of the last operating independent media platforms in Egypt. The latest incident involved the summoning of Editor-in-Chief Lina Attalah for interrogation before the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) on Monday, 4 August 2025, in Case No. 6182 of 2025 (SSSP).

This interrogation came two days after Mada Masr published an investigative report on the poor detention conditions and human rights abuses in Badr 3 Prison, including a leaked letter attributed to former Alexandria Deputy Governor Hassan El-Borens. The following day, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement claiming the letter was “fabricated” and announcing legal action against those allegedly responsible for circulating it, raising serious concerns about the use of security and judicial institutions to silence investigative journalism.

During the interrogation session, the prosecution denied journalist Iman Ouf the right to attend the hearing as a representative of the Press Syndicate. This denial constitutes a violation of Lina Attalah’s right to union representation, as stipulated in the Press Syndicate Law, and underscores growing restrictions on the role of professional unions, particularly in defending press freedom.

This is not an isolated incident but part of a broader, sustained campaign of repression against Mada Masr and its journalists. In May 2020, Lina Attalah was arrested while conducting an interview outside Tora Prison Complex and later released on bail after being charged with filming a security facility without a permit. In September 2022, she and three other journalists from Mada Masr were interrogated over a report alleging corruption within the pro-government Nation’s Future Party, and were also released on bail.

In 2024, she was summoned following a complaint by the Supreme Council for Media Regulation over a report on scenarios of forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza. That same year, journalist Rana Mamdouh was arrested while working on an investigative piece in Ras El-Hekma and referred to the SSSP before being released on bail. All of these cases remain open, and the journalists continue to face the threat of imprisonment.

These incidents reflect a broader and persistent pattern of repression of press freedom in Egypt. According to recent reports by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters without Borders (RSF), at least 26 journalists remain behind bars, including 11 members of the Press Syndicate, in connection with their professional activities. At least 14 journalists and media workers

in exile have also been placed on Egypt's terrorism lists, marking a dangerous expansion of transnational repression targeting critical voices abroad.

The ongoing blocking of over 600 websites, including Mada Masr, Al-Manassa, and Zawia3, without any judicial order, is part of a systematic effort to silence independent media platforms. Prominent journalists have also been targeted, including Nora Younis, Editor-in-Chief of Al-Manassa, who was subjected to interrogation in 2020 following a raid on the outlet's offices and the seizure of its equipment. Ahmed Gamal Ziada, Editor-in-Chief of *Zawia3*, who was subjected to transnational repression in August 2023 when his father was arbitrarily detained in Egypt in apparent retaliation for Ziada's journalistic work and the editorial stance of *Zawia3*, which has been openly critical of Egyptian state policies.

More recently, on 22 July 2024, Ashraf Omar, a political cartoonist at Al-Manassa, was arbitrarily arrested from his home in Giza without a warrant or explanation and remains held under "terrorism"-related charges. His detention reflects an alarming escalation in the crackdown on freedom of expression and independent journalism in Egypt.

These escalating violations starkly violate Egypt's international obligations, particularly in light of its recent nomination of a government official for the post of Director-General of UNESCO, the very agency tasked with safeguarding press freedom and promoting media pluralism. This nomination highlights a stark contradiction between Egypt's stated international commitments and its ongoing domestic repression of journalists and media institutions.

The undersigned organizations call on the Egyptian authorities to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Lina Attalah and Mada Masr journalists and cease any further legal harassment.
2. End the use of the Supreme State Security Prosecution and counter-terrorism laws in cases related to journalism and publishing.
3. Lift the unlawful block on Mada Masr, Al Manassa, Zawia3, and ensure free access to independent media content.
4. Immediately and unconditionally release all journalists imprisoned for their work and review all related cases to ensure compliance with constitutional and international standards.
5. Halt the listing of journalists in exile on terrorism watchlists, and stop all forms of transnational repression.
6. Guarantee the independence of professional syndicates and enable them to play their role in defending press freedom and protecting journalists from state retaliation.

Signatories:

Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
Egyptian Front for Human Rights
El Nadim Center

REDWORD for Human Rights & Freedom of Expression
Middle East Democracy Center (MEDC)
DIGITAL DEMOCRACY NOW.
Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
Human Rights First
The Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms
EuroMed Rights
HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
Andalus Center for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies
Their Right – To Defend Prisoners of Conscience
World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
Cairo Institute For Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
MENA Rights Group
EgyptWide – Egyptian-Italian Initiative for Rights and Freedom

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