

URGENT ACTION

CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CONTINUES

The EI Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence was raided by police and shut down on 9 February. The Egyptian authorities' crackdown on human rights organizations, with a politically-motivated investigation underway, could result in numerous leading human rights defenders facing life imprisonment.

On 9 February, the **EI Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence (EI Nadeem)** was raided by police and shut down. The closure of EI Nadeem, an organization that offers crucial support to survivors of torture and violence, follows a year of harassment by the authorities of human rights defenders (HRDs) and organisations. In February 2016, security forces entered EI Nadeem's Cairo premises and presented staff with an order to close operations, without an explanation. The centre filed a judicial appeal against the decision before an Egyptian court the same month. However, police carried out the latest raid without waiting for the outcome of the appeal. In November 2016, the Central Bank of Egypt also issued an order to freeze the organization's bank account.

Over the past year, judges have been overseeing a criminal investigation into the activities and funding of Egyptian human rights organizations, known as Case 173 of 2011. HRDs may face up to 25 years in prison and a fine of LE500,000 (US\$ 27,528), if convicted of the charge of receiving foreign funding to damage Egypt's "national interests", "peace", "unity" or "security" under Article 78 of the Penal Code. The authorities have used a range of tactics to disrupt the activities of HRDs, including arbitrary arrests, interrogations, arbitrary travel bans and asset freezes. Since early 2016, at least 22 NGO workers, including directors, have been summoned for interrogation; 18 human rights activists and defenders have been barred from travelling; and asset freezes have been imposed against 7 NGOs and 10 individuals.

On 29 November 2016, Parliament approved a new draft law, replacing the existing associations law, which would severely restrict the work of NGOs. The bill is pending ratification by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. If signed into law, it would force NGOs to seek official approval to conduct field research, publish their findings and seek funding.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Egyptian authorities to close the politically motivated Case 173 of 2011 and end the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders;
- Calling on them to ensure that the asset freezes, imposed on human rights defenders and organizations in Case 173 of 2011, and arbitrary travel bans, are immediately lifted;
- Calling on them to reject the new NGO bill, because it contravenes Egypt's 2014 constitution, as well as international law and standards on the right to freedom of association.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 APRIL 2017 TO:

President
Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2391 1441
Email: p.spokesman@op.gov.eg
Twitter: @AlsisiOfficial
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Social Solidarity
Ghada Waly
Ministry of Social Solidarity
19 Maragahi Street, Agouza
Giza, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 3337 5390
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Human Rights
Laila Bahaa El Din
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2576 7967
Email: Contact.Us@mfa.gov.eg
Twitter: @MfaEgypt

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR NASSER AHMED KAMEL ALI, Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 26 South Street W1K 1DW, 020 7499 3304/2401, Fax 020 7491 1542, eg.emb.london@mfa.gov.eg and etembuk@hotmail.com

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the eighth update of UA 81/16. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/5365/2016/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Amnesty International has been closely monitoring and documenting the harassment of human rights defenders in Egypt. On 26 January, human rights lawyer Negad al-Borai was prevented from boarding an international flight at Cairo International Airport. He was notified by airport officials that the prosecutor general's office had issued a travel ban against him without informing him of the reason. Negad al-Borai is head of the legal unit of United Group for Law, a law firm. He has been interrogated by the authorities on charges of establishing an illegal entity and spreading false information, and questioned in connection with a workshop held on a draft anti-torture law.

A Cairo court decided on 11 January, to freeze the organizational and personal assets of Mozn Hassan, founder and director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, as well as Mohamed Zarea and Atef Hafez, both of the Arab Penal Reform Organization. This decision came in relation to Case 173. An asset freeze was also upheld by a Cairo court on 14 December 2016 against women's human rights defender Azza Soliman and her human rights firm, Lawyers for Justice and Peace. One week prior, security forces arrested Azza Soliman at her home and brought her before one of the judges hearing Case 173. The judge interrogated her for approximately three hours over charges that included receiving funds from abroad with the intention of harming Egypt, tax evasion and establishing an entity, which carries out the activities of an association. She was released on the same day after paying a bail of 20,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$ 1,093).

On 15 June 2016, a court froze the assets of Al-Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-violence Studies and its director Ahmed Samih. On 17 September 2016, a court upheld an asset freeze ordered by one of the Case 173 judges against five human rights defenders: Hossam Bahgat, founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights; Gamal Eid, director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information; Bahey el-Din Hassan, director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Mostafa al-Hassan, director of the Hisham Mubarak Law Center; and Abdel Hafez Tayel, director of the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education (ECRE). The court also froze the assets of CIHRS, the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, and ECRE.

The 17 other human rights activists and defenders issued with travel bans are: Hossam el-Deen Ali, Ahmed Ghonim, Bassem Samir and Israa Abdelfattah of the Egyptian Democratic Academy; Mohamed Lotfy of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms; Gamal Eid; Hossam Bahgat; Mohamed Zaree, head of CIHRS' Egypt office; Hoda Abdel Wahab and Nasser Amin, of the Arab Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and Legal Profession; Mozn Hassan; Ahmed Ragheb, lawyer and founder of the National Community for Human Rights and Law; Reda El Danbouky of the Women's Center for Guidance and Legal Awareness; human rights lawyer Malek Adly; Azza Soliman; Aida Seif El Dawla of El Nadeem; and, Abdel Hafez Tayel.

Recent moves by the authorities raise fears that the prosecution of Egyptian HRDs is imminent. Separately, the new draft NGO law, which has yet to be signed by the President, is the most repressive of multiple drafts seen by Amnesty International since 2011 and is far more restrictive than the current Mubarak-era NGO law on associations no 84 of 2002, which itself contravenes the 2014 constitution and Egypt's obligations under international human rights law. The right to freedom of association is established under Article 75 of Egypt's constitution and Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Egypt is a state party. Freedom of movement is also guaranteed under Article 62 of the Constitution and Article 12 of the ICCPR.

Further information on UA: 81/16 Index: MDE 12/5780/2017 Issue Date: 27 February 2017