

URGENT ACTION

EGYPTIAN DEFENDERS AND JOURNALISTS DETAINED

Ezzat Ghoniem is a human rights defender and co-founder and director of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms. He has been detained for almost a month over unfounded charges along with journalists Mostafa al- Aassar, Hassan al-Banna and Moataz Wadnan, and lawyer Azzoz Mahgoub.

On 1 March, Egyptian authorities arrested **Ezzat Ghoniem**, human rights defender and co-founder of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, while he was heading home. He was detained and interrogated for three days by the State Security prosecutor without access to a lawyer. The authorities withheld information about his whereabouts in what may amount to an enforced disappearance. National Security Agency (NSA) officers filmed Ezzat Ghoniem without his consent and the Ministry of Interior later showed excerpts from the video on its Facebook page, claiming that Ezzat Ghoniem was part of an organized “human rights terrorism” plot. He is currently in detention in the Tora prison complex South of Cairo pending investigations for joining a banned group, disseminating false news, and providing international bodies with false information in case 441/2018.

On 4 February, authorities arrested journalist **Mustafa al-Aassar** and his roommate (also a journalist), **Hassan al-Banna Mubarak**, while on their way to work in Giza. They forcibly disappeared both men for 13 days. On 16 February, authorities arrested journalist **Moataz Wadnan**, after he conducted an interview with **Hisham Genena**, the former head of the Egyptian Central Auditing Organization. Egyptian authorities also arrested Hisham Genena after he publicly supported potential presidential candidate Sami Anan, who was also arrested after he announced his bid against President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Al-Aassar, al-Banna, and Wadnan are currently detained in the Tora prison complex as part of the same case as Ezzat Ghoniem, pending investigation on charges of publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security and joining a “banned group”.

Egyptian authorities also arrested lawyer **Azzoz Mahgoub** on 1 March. Azzoz Mahgoub is the lawyer for Mona Mahmoud known as “Om Zubida”, who is currently in detention following a video appearance on the BBC in which she described the torture and enforced disappearance of her daughter. Azzoz Mahgoub is currently detained in the Tora prison complex pending investigations for joining a “banned group”, disseminating false news, and providing international bodies with false information. If convicted, the defendants could face up to 15 years in prison. Amnesty International believes that their detention stems solely from their peaceful human rights work and the exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

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

- Calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Ezzat Ghoniem, Mustafa al-Aassar, Hassan al-Banna Mubarak, Moataz Wadnan, Hisham Genena and Azzoz Mahgoub as they are detained solely for their peaceful human rights work and the exercise of their right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to investigate all reports of enforced disappearance, including of Ezzat Ghoniem, Mostafa al-Assar, and Hassan al-Bana, make the results public and bring those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 MAY 2018 TO:

Public Prosecutor

Nabil Sadek
Office of the Public Prosecutor, Dar al-Qada al-Ali, Down Town
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2577 4716

Salutation: Dear Counsellor

President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax +202 2391 1441

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Human Rights

Ahmed Ihab Gamal-Eldin Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Corniche el-Nile, Cairo, Egypt.

Fax: +202 2574 9713

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.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Egyptian authorities have embarked on a wave of arrests against potential presidential candidates, journalists, human rights defenders and other activists over the past four months, as the presidential elections have been closing in. As of March 2018, Egyptian authorities have censored at least 496 websites, including those of NGOs, media, and proxies.

So far, Egyptian authorities have arrested a wide array of activists and public figures for stating their opinions on social media or in interviews. The list includes former presidential candidate Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, potential presidential candidate Sami Anan, former head of the Egyptian Central Auditing Organization, social media figure Islam Refai, activists Hassan Hussein and Gamal Abdelfath, an entire team of theatre actors, and many more.

The authorities have also arrested at least 13 journalists in the most recent crackdown. This brings the total number of detained journalists to 26. The list includes Mahmoud Abu Zied, known as "Shawkan" who has been in prison for over four years as part of a mass trial along with 738 others. Most recently, authorities have also forcibly disappeared and are currently detaining video editor Ahmed Tarek.

Egyptian authorities have also attempted to silence non-Egyptian media operating in Egypt. On 20 February, Egyptian authorities arrested and then deported Bel Trew, a British journalist working for the Guardian in Egypt. Another example is a BBC video that was documenting torture in Egyptian places of detention, and showed interviews of human rights defenders and victims. Following the screening, Egyptian authorities discredited the film and the BBC. Further, they arrested one of the interviewees, Om Zubida, for "disseminating false news". The Egyptian public prosecutor has also discredited "the forces of evil" in reference to those who criticize the conduct of Egyptian authorities. While Egyptian authorities are investigating both Ezzat Ghoniem and Azzoz Mahgoub on several charges, including two charges in relation to the BBC video.

Egyptian authorities have also been harassing civil society NGOs over the past two years. This includes The Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms. The NGO was co-founded by Ezzat Ghoniem in August 2014. It documents human rights violations by Egyptian authorities and campaigns against several practices, including the death penalty, torture, extrajudicial executions, and enforced disappearances. In addition to the Egyptian Coordination and Ezzat Ghoniem, Egyptian authorities continue to detain the director of Mada for Media Development and journalist Hisham Gaafar for over two years now.

An enforced disappearance is the arrest, detention or abduction of an individual by state agents, or people acting with their authorization, support or acquiescence, followed by the refusal to acknowledge this or conceal the person's fate or whereabouts placing them outside the protection of the law. Enforced disappearances are crimes under international law.

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