

URGENT ACTION

CONCERN GROWS FOR EGYPTIAN NGOS

A court case against Egyptian human rights defenders has now increased to include three other human rights organizations.

On 20 April a Cairo court, hearing a case against Egyptian human rights defenders and their families, named seven new defendants - including the directors of three human rights groups. The next hearing has been set for 23 May.

The new defendants named in the case are: **Bahey el-Din Hassan**, the Director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), as well as two members of his family and two other people who have worked for CIHRS; **Mostafa al-Hassan**, the Director of the Hisham Mubarak Law Center; and **Abdel Hafez Tayel**, the Director of the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education.

They join original defendants **Hossam Bahgat**, an investigative journalist and founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, and **Gamal Eid**, founder of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, as well as Gamal Eid's wife and daughter.

The criminal court is reviewing a judicial order to freeze the assets of the defendants, issued by judges investigating the funding of Egyptian human rights groups. Human rights organizations are facing an unprecedented crackdown in Egypt and staff fear they could be prosecuted and jailed for up to 25 years on charges of breaching repressive foreign funding laws.

The court case comes as the authorities step up their investigation into human rights groups, questioning their staff and blocking several from travelling abroad. The government has also ordered the closure of a prominent human rights organization, El Nadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence (see UA 81/16).

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

- Calling on the Egyptian authorities to lift all asset freezes and travel bans imposed upon human rights defenders and other NGO staff for exercising their right to freedom of association;
- Urging them to immediately revoke their decision to close El Nadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence;
- Urging them to pass a new law on associations that is in line with international standards and the Egyptian Constitution, and grant NGOs a reasonable grace period to register under this new law.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 JUNE 2016 TO:

Minister of Social Solidarity
Her Excellency Ghada Waly
Ministry of Social Solidarity
19 Maraghi Street
Giza, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 794 8257 / +202 3 337 5390
Salutation: Your Excellency

Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister
Mahy Hassan Abdel Latif
Deputy Assistant Minister for Human
Rights and NGO Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 574 9713
Email: contact.us@mfa.gov.eg
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
President of the National Council for
Human Rights
Mohamed Fayek
69 Giza St. – next to the Embassy of
Saudi Arabia
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 3 762 4852

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, egtamboff@gmail.com, and eg.emb_london@mfa.gov.eg

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 81/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE12/3799/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Human rights groups in Egypt are facing an unprecedented crackdown. The authorities have stepped-up a long-running criminal inquiry into NGOs' registration and funding, questioning human rights defenders and preventing them from travelling abroad.

Last month, the judges leading the inquiry ordered asset freezes against Hossam Bahgat and Gamal Eid. The order is now being reviewed by a Cairo criminal court. The judges have also continued to order other human rights defenders to appear before them for questioning. They include award-winning human rights defender Mozn Hassan, the founder and director of Nazra for Feminist Studies.

A number of human rights defenders have also faced travel bans imposed by courts, prosecutors and security agencies.

On 19 April, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon's office issued a statement noting the situation facing human rights groups in Egypt, and calling on the authorities to grant the defendants "due process and fair trial standards". In March, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed "grave concern" about the situation facing Egyptian human rights organizations.

Egypt's military government began investigations into human rights groups in 2011. In December 2011, security forces and prosecutors raided the offices of five international NGOs and two Egyptian human rights organizations. In 2012 43 staff members of international groups were tried in court on charges of working without registration and receiving foreign funding without government permission. In June 2013, the court sentenced all the defendants to prison terms of between one and five years. The court issued most of the sentences in the absence of the defendants, handing down suspended sentences against the few who were in court.

Both the Law on Associations and the Penal Code criminalize accepting funding from international sources without government permission. Egypt's government ordered all NGOs to register under the Law on Associations in 2014, threatening to hold "accountable" those that did not. However, the law gives the authorities sweeping powers to block the funding of registered groups and dissolve them on the grounds that they threaten "national unity".

Egypt's laws restricting the foreign funding of civil society have been repeatedly criticized by UN bodies monitoring Egypt's compliance with international human rights treaties. On 19 April an Egyptian administrative court ruled that NGOs had the right to receive funding from international sources, so long as such funding did not threaten "public order, safety or morality". In practice the authorities have frequently used such grounds as a pretext to arbitrarily block the funding of Egyptian human rights groups.

Under Article 78 of the Penal Code, individuals may also face a 25-year prison sentence and a 500,000 Egyptian-pound fine (US\$56,300) for receiving money or materials for acts that would harm Egyptian "national interest", undermine the country's "territorial integrity" or disturb "the public peace".

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, to which Egypt is a State Party.

Name: Bahey el-Din Hassan (m), Mostafa al-Hassan (m), Abdel Hafez Tayel (m), Hossam Bahgat (m), Gamal Eid (m), and numerous other human rights defenders (both)

Gender m/f: Both

Further information on UA: 81/16 Index: MDE 12/3886/2016 Issue Date: 22 April 2016