

URGENT ACTION

STOP HARASSING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

On 17 July, Cairo Criminal Court is due to review a judicial order to freeze the assets of five leading human rights defenders (HRDs), members of their family, an NGO and their staff. They, and other prominent HRDs, are being investigated in Case 173 of 2011, the “foreign funding case”. If convicted, they could face up to life imprisonment.

Cairo Criminal Court will review on 17 July a judicial order to freeze the assets of **Hossam Bahgat**, founder and board member of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, **Gamal Eid**, founder of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information, as well as his wife and daughter, **Bahey el-Din Hassan**, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) director, members of his family as well as some of CIHRS’s staff; **Mostafa al-Hassan**, director of the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, and **Abdel Hafez Tayel**, director of the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education. A request to freeze the assets of CIHRS has also been made.

On 27 June, award-winning women’s rights defender **Mozn Hassan**, who is founder and executive director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, was banned from travel. Cairo airport passport administration officials did not provide her with information about the reason for the ban, only that the Public Prosecutor ordered it. Mozn Hassan is named as a defendant in Case 173. **Hoda Abd El-Wahab**, executive director of the Arab Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession, was also banned from travel on 20 June by order of a judge in Case 173. The case is looking at the sources of funding and registration of Egyptian NGOs.

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

- Calling on Egypt’s authorities to close politically motivated Case 173 of 2011 and end the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders taken with reference to the case, including travel bans, asset freeze orders and trumped-up tax investigations;
- Urging them to abide by their own pledges made in March 2015 at the conclusion of Egypt’s Universal Periodic Review before the UN Human Rights Council to “respect the free exercise of the associations defending human rights” and fulfil the right to freedom of association, enshrined in Article 75 of Egypt’s 2014 Constitution and Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is a State Party;
- Calling on them to ensure that the criminal justice system is not misused to target or harass human rights defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 AUGUST 2016 TO:

Minister of Social Solidarity

Ghada Waly
Ministry of Social Solidarity
19 Maraghi Street, Agouza
Giza, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 3337 5420/+202 3337 5404
Salutation: Your Excellency

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: foreign.legalization@mfa.gov.eg
Contact.Us@mfa.gov.eg
Twitter: @MfaEgypt

And copies to:

President of the National Council for Human Rights
Mohamed Fayek
69 Giza St. – next to the Embassy of Saudi Arabia
Giza, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 3762 4852
Email: Nchr@nchr.org.eg
Twitter: @nchregypt

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, 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 third update of UA 81/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE12/4251/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Under Article 78 of Egypt's penal code, individuals may face a sentence of up to 25 years and a 500,000 Egyptian pound fine (US\$56,164) for receiving money or material for acts that would harm Egypt's "national interest", undermine the country's "territorial integrity" or disturb "the public peace". Egypt's laws restricting foreign funding have been repeatedly criticised for being contrary to the right to freedom of association by different UN bodies. The right to freedom of association is established under Article 75 of Egypt's 2014 constitution and Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Freedom of movement is also guaranteed under Article 62 of Egypt's constitution and Article 12 of the ICCPR.

Travel bans are being arbitrarily used by Egypt's authorities to intimidate and silence critical voices. Mohamed Zaree, Egypt director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), learned on 26 May at Cairo airport that he was subjected to a travel ban. He was not provided with any information about which authority ordered it or what case it relates to, but told Amnesty International that the "foreign funding case" is the only possible explanation.

On 15 June, North Cairo Criminal Court ruled to freeze the assets of Al-Andalus Institute for Tolerance and anti-Violence, a research institute, and its director Ahmed Samih. He only found out about the asset freeze request on 12 June through a state-run newspaper. It said the request came from judges investigating the registration and sources of funding of NGOs in Case 173.

The authorities have also repeatedly attempted to close the El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence on the basis of performing unlicensed work; although licensed as a medical clinic since 1993. Many of those targeted by the foreign funding case are licensed in some fashion, including as non-profit groups, law firms or medical clinics. Still, some have relocated their staff outside Egypt or curtailed their operations rather than register under the onerous associations law dating to Hosni Mubarak's presidency. The law empowers the government to shut down any group virtually at will, freeze its assets, confiscate its property and reject nominees to its governing board. But, even registered groups have not escaped investigation: the Egyptian Democratic Academy (EDA), an organization working to spread democracy and human rights in the country, successfully registered in January 2015 and Nazra registered in 2007. Travel bans have been imposed on four of EDA's current and former staff members, including political activist Esraa Abdel Fattah, as well as Hossameldin Ali, Ahmed Ghonim and Bassim Samir.

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.

Further information on UA: 81/16 Index: MDE 12/4421/2016 Issue Date: 11 July 2016