

URGENT ACTION

NGO STAFF AND FAMILIES AT RISK OF ASSET FREEZING

On 17 September an Egyptian court will rule on whether to freeze the assets of leading human rights defenders and members of their families as part of the “foreign funding case”. They may subsequently face prosecution and prison terms of up to 25 years.

On 15 August the Cairo Criminal Court announced that it would rule on 17 September on whether to freeze the assets of several human rights defenders and members of their families.

The case against the group has been brought by judges overseeing an inquiry into human rights groups, known as Case 173 of 2011, on charges that include obtaining funding without government authorization and undermining Egypt’s “national interest”, “territorial integrity” and “public peace”.

The authorities are using the asset freezing and investigation to punish their critics and silence human rights organizations. The authorities have also banned a growing number of human rights defenders from travelling abroad, apparently to prevent them from criticising Egypt’s human rights record. They have ordered the closure of one NGO, with others expected to follow.

Human rights defenders increasingly fear that they could soon be prosecuted and jailed for up to 25 years on charges of breaching repressive foreign funding laws.

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

- Calling on Egypt’s authorities to end the harassment of human rights defenders, including through travel bans, asset freezes and closure orders, as well as to close spurious and politically motivated 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 (ICCPR), to which Egypt is a State Party;
- Calling on them not to misuse the criminal justice system to harass human rights defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 SEPTEMBER 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
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Corniche al-Nil, Cairo
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Fax: +202 2576 7967
Email: Contact.Us@mfa.gov.eg
Twitter: @MfaEgypt

President of the National Council for

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

And copies to:

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 fourth update of UA 81/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE12/4421/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Those named in the asset-freeze case are: Hossam Bahgat, an investigative journalist and founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights; Gamal Eid, founder of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, as well as his wife and daughter; Bahey el-Din Hassan, director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), as well as members of his family and two other people who have worked for 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.

A court froze the assets of another NGO, Al-Andalus Institute for Tolerance and anti-Violence Studies, in a separate case in June along with the assets of its director Ahmed Samih.

In February the government ordered the closure of one of Egypt's most prominent human rights organizations, El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence. The organization has continued to operate and challenged the government's decision before the courts.

Many staff at human rights organizations have been questioned by judicial authorities as part of the investigation. The authorities have also banned an increasing number from travelling abroad, including defendants in the "foreign-funding case", Nazra for Feminist Studies director Mozn Hassan, CIHRS Egypt director Mohamed Zaree, Arab Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession directors Nasser Amin and Hoda Abd el-Wahab, Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms director Mohamed Lotfy, as well as others.

Egyptian law proscribes unregistered NGOs and obtaining funding without government consent. Offenders face a 25-year prison sentence and a LE500,000 fine (US\$56,320) for receiving money or materials to harm the country's "national interest", "territorial integrity" and "public peace".

The investigation into human rights organizations and other NGOs dates from 2011 and initially focused on international groups operating within Egypt. 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.

The right to freedom of association is established under Article 75 of Egypt's 2014 constitution and Article 22 of the ICCPR. Freedom of movement is also guaranteed under Article 62 of Egypt's constitution and Article 12 of the ICCPR.

Further information on UA: 81/16 Index: MDE 12/4686/2016 Issue Date: 19 August 2016