

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## EGYPT: FURTHER RESTRICTIONS ON CIVIL SOCIETY LOOMING

Amnesty International today warned that Egyptian civil society continues to face increasing harassment, as one of the oldest human rights organizations in the country is up for possible dissolution and as the Egyptian authorities are preparing new amendments to further restrict the activities of non-governmental organizations.

The warning comes as the Ministry of Social Solidarity sent a letter to the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), dated 14 April, informing the organization that it faces an accountability review under Article 42 of the Law on Associations (Law 84 of 2002), which could lead to possible dissolution and closure. The Ministry claimed that the EOHR breached Article 17 of the Law on Associations for receiving foreign funding – allegedly without the Ministry's prior consent. A Deputy Minister of Social Solidarity has since claimed that the action taken against the EOHR is a procedural matter, and that the authorities have no intention of closing the EOHR.

In a letter to the Minister of Social Solidarity, Amnesty International expressed fears that the action against the EOHR may be linked to its long-running efforts to bring the Egyptian Law on Associations into line with international law and standards, as well as its plan to establish an Egyptian network for the right to access and circulate information. The organization urged the authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure that the EOHR is able to carry out its legitimate activities for the protection of human rights without fear, harassment or interference.

The EOHR is the latest victim of Egypt's repressive Law on Associations, which imposes strict restrictions on non-governmental organizations – including on accepting foreign funding without official approval. Non-governmental organizations found to be in breach of the law face closure and dissolution by decision from the Minister of Social Solidarity under Article 42 of the legislation.

Although an appeal can be made against dissolution, in practice, by the time the appeal is heard by an administrative court, the work and activities of the organization concerned will be considered illegal, its assets seized and its funds frozen. This was the case for the Association for Human Rights and Legal Aid in 2007. By the time it won the case against its dissolution in 2008, it had already lost its office and is now striving to receive its possessions back from the authorities.

These repressive restrictions have not escaped international scrutiny. Already in November 2002, a few months after the entry into force of the Law on Associations, the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), the body which oversees the implementation by member states of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, called on the Egyptian authorities to "review its legislation and practice in order to enable non-governmental organizations to discharge their functions without impediments ... such as prior authorization, funding controls and administrative dissolution."

Despite this unequivocal call, nothing has been done by the Egyptian authorities to implement this or other recommendations of the HRC in order to strengthen the right to freedom of association, and Egyptian NGOs continue to live under threat of dissolution and closure by administrative orders. Planned amendments to the law are reported to include even further restrictions and administrative obstacles, ostensibly for security reasons.

Amnesty International said that until the Law on Associations is brought in line with international law, the Egyptian authorities should revoke the decision to submit the EOHR to the accountability review as a result of its use of funding. The organization also urged the authorities to ensure that the planned amendments to the Law on Associations guarantees more, not less, freedom to NGOs to enable them to carry out their work in defence of human rights without fear of intimidation, dissolution or imprisonment.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: [press@amnesty.org](mailto:press@amnesty.org)

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK  
[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)