EGYPT: JOINT STATEMENT: VETERAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER
BAHEY EL-DIN HASSAN SENTENCED TO 15-YEARS IN PRISON
PUNISHED FOR HIS CRITICAL TWEETS

On 25 August 2020, the Fifth “Terrorism Circuit” of the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced Bahey el-Din Hassan, a veteran human rights defender, to 15 years in prison on the basis of his critical tweets, 18 human rights organizations said today. The conviction of Bahey el-Din Hassan, director and co-founder of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), of charges of “publishing false news” and “insulting the judiciary” is a new low for the Egyptian judiciary. The ruling was issued in absentia as Mr Hassan has been living abroad, in self-exile, since 2014.

This ruling constitutes the latest reprisal against Mr Hassan for his work promoting human rights in Egypt. In September 2019, a court sentenced him in absentia to three years in prison and a 20,000 EGP ($1,260 USD) fine in relation to a tweet in which he criticized the Egyptian public prosecution.

In March 2018, and as part of the continuous smear campaigns against him in government and pro-government media, he received death threats by an Egyptian TV show host after seven Egyptian independent human rights groups, including CIHRS, sent a memo to the UN Secretary-General regarding the presidential elections in Egypt.

These actions are clearly intended to punish Mr Hassan for his criticism of the Egyptian authorities’ appalling human rights record and to intimidate his colleagues at CIHRS and other independent Egyptian human rights organizations.

The latest ruling cites several of Mr Hassan’s tweets as evidence against him for “insulting the judiciary” and “publishing false information that could undermine public security, its national and economic interests”. In these tweets, Mr. Hassan criticized torture and lack of judicial independence, and mentioned the call for justice for the Italian student Giulio Regeni, who was killed in Cairo in January 2016, after being abducted and tortured.

Under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Egyptian authorities have been cracking down on human rights organizations and activists in an unprecedented fashion. Dozens have faced arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, ill-treatment and judicial harassment, including abusive investigations, travel bans and asset freezes.

In addition, the Egyptian authorities have increasingly been targeting human rights defenders now in exile, including by harassing and arresting their family members in Egypt in a clear pattern of intimidation and reprisals for their human rights work.

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly condemn Bahey el-Din Hassan’s conviction and sentencing on trumped-up charges in reprisal for his legitimate human rights work, and urge the Egyptian authorities to quash the verdicts against Mr Hassan. We also call upon Egypt’s international partners to denounce the Egyptian authorities’ shameful pattern of reprisals against human rights defenders. We call upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, the Human Rights Council and other relevant mechanisms to immediately take steps to address the ongoing targeting of human rights defenders in Egypt.

About Bahey el-Din Hassan

Bahey el-Din Hassan, one of the founding members of the human rights movement in Egypt and the Arab region, is director and co-founder of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), and a member of the boards and advisory committees of several international human rights organizations, including the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF), Human Rights Watch (HRW) Middle East and North Africa Division, and...

Signed:
Amnesty International
Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-violence Studies
Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI)
Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC)
Cultura è Libertà.
Egyptian Front for Human Rights
EuroMed Rights
FIDH, in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
Freedom Initiative
Front Line Defenders
Giuristi Democratici
Human Rights Watch
IFEX
International Service for Human Rights
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
Reporters Without Borders
The Egyptian Human Rights Forum
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

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