

URGENT ACTION

WHEREABOUTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS UNKNOWN

Ezzat Ghoniem, a human rights defender and co-founder and director of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, and Azzoz Mahgoub, a human rights lawyer at the same organization, have been forcibly disappeared since 14 September and remain detained despite a court order to release them on 4 September.

Since 14 September, human rights defenders **Ezzat Ghoniem** and **Azzoz Mahgoub**, have been forcibly disappeared. On 4 September, a court ordered their release under probation pending investigations into their case. Security forces moved them to separate police stations in Haram and Imbaba in Greater Cairo, where they were to be held until their release. On 14 September, their families went to visit them and were told by security forces that they have already been released. Their families and lawyers told Amnesty International that they do not know the fate and whereabouts of neither of them. Both were last seen in the custody of Egyptian security forces, while in detention in two separate police stations. Amnesty International believes that both Ezzat Ghoniem and Azzoz Mahgoub have been forcibly disappeared and are at great risk of torture. Their families are also worried that under their probation terms, if they remain forcibly disappeared until the next hearing, the judge would order their detention again.

An enforced disappearance is the arrest, detention or abduction of an individual by state agents, or people acting with their authorization, support or acquiescence, followed by the refusal to acknowledge this or the concealment of the person's fate or whereabouts placing them outside the protection of the law. Enforced disappearance is a crime under international law.

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

- Calling on the authorities to immediately reveal the fate and whereabouts of Ezzat Ghoniem and Azzoz Mahgoub;
- Insist that if Ezzat Ghoniem and Azzoz Mahgoub are in their custody that they are immediately and unconditionally released, as they have been detained solely for their peaceful human rights work and the exercise of their right to freedom of expression and to ensure pending their release that their human rights are protected and respected at all time, including – if they are held in custody – the right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment;
- Urging them to launch a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the enforced disappearance of Ezzat Ghoniem and Azzoz Mahgoub, make the results public and bring all those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 02 NOVEMBER 2018 TO:

Public Prosecutor

Nabil Sadek
Office of the Public Prosecutor, Dar al-Qada al-Ali, Down Town
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2577 4716
Salutation: Dear Counsellor

President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax +202 2391 1441
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Human Rights
Ahmed Ihab Gamal-Eldin Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche el-Nile, Cairo, Egypt.
Fax: +202 2574 9713
Email: contact.us@mfa.gov.eg
Twitter: @MfaEgypt

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 69/18. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/8148/2018/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Amnesty International has extensively documented Egyptian security forces' use of enforced disappearances as a tool against political activists and protesters, including students and children in Egypt (see <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/4368/2016/en/>). Hundreds of people forcibly disappeared were arbitrarily arrested and held incommunicado in secret detention with no access to their lawyers or families and no external judicial oversight. This pattern of abuse became particularly evident after President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi appointed Major-General Magdy Abd el-Ghaffar as Minister of Interior in March 2015.

The crackdown on freedom of expression under Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has reached alarming new levels unparalleled in Egypt's recent history. Amnesty International launched a campaign calling for the unconditional and immediate release of all those who have been detained solely for peacefully expressing their views. Since December 2017, the Egyptian authorities have arrested at least 111 activists and public figures for stating their opinions on social media or in media interviews. The authorities have also arrested at least 28 journalists in the most recent crackdown on freedom of expression.

On 1 March, Egyptian authorities arrested Ezzat Ghoniem, a human rights defender and co-founder of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, while he was heading home. He was detained and interrogated for three days by the State Security prosecutor without access to a lawyer. The authorities withheld information about his whereabouts in what may have amounted to an enforced disappearance. National Security Agency (NSA) officers filmed Ezzat Ghoniem without his consent and the Ministry of Interior later showed excerpts from the video on its Facebook page, claiming that Ezzat Ghoniem was part of an organized "human rights terrorism" plot.

Egyptian authorities also arrested human rights lawyer Azzoz Mahgoub on 1 March. Azzoz Mahgoub is the lawyer for Mona Mahmoud known as "Om Zubida", who is currently in detention following a video appearance on the BBC in which she described the torture and enforced disappearance of her daughter. Azzoz Mahgoub was held in the Tora prison complex pending investigations for joining a "banned group", disseminating false news, and providing international bodies with false information.

If convicted, Ezzat Ghoniem and Azzoz Mahgoub could face up to 15 years in prison. Amnesty International believes that their detention stemmed solely from their peaceful human rights work and the exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

Egyptian authorities have been harassing civil society organizations over the past two years, including the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms. The NGO was co-founded by Ezzat Ghoniem in August 2014. It documents human rights violations by Egyptian authorities and campaigns against several practices, including the death penalty, torture, extrajudicial executions, and enforced disappearances.

Name: Ezzat Ghoniem, Azzoz Mahgoub
Gender m/f: male

Further information on UA: 69/18 Index: MDE 12/9147/2018 Issue Date: 21 September 2018