

URGENT ACTION

NGOS FACE UNPRECEDENTED CRACKDOWN

Egyptian human rights organizations are facing an unprecedented crackdown. The government has ordered the closure of a leading torture-rehabilitation centre and human rights defenders have faced questioning, travel bans and asset freezes.

Egyptian authorities are moving to shut down human rights organizations, while human rights defenders fear they could be prosecuted and jailed for up to 25 years on charges of breaching repressive foreign funding laws.

On 5 April, officials from the Health Ministry and the local government attempted to close down a leading human rights group, **El Nadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence**. Staff at the centre told Amnesty International that the officials had ordered them to leave the offices, but refused to show them a copy of the official decision shuttering the centre. The staff refused to leave the centre, but fear the officials may soon return backed by security forces.

In a separate move, judges overseeing a criminal investigation into the funding of NGOs have asked the courts to freeze the assets of two well-known human rights defenders. They are **Hossam Baghat**, an investigative journalist and the founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, and **Gamal Eid**, founder and director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, as well as two members of his family. A court will hear the case on 20 April.

The investigation has seen many human rights defenders and NGO staff questioned over their registration, activities and funding sources, including at least seven since the beginning of March. Staff at human rights groups, as well as groups working for political reform, are also among the dozens of people who have been barred from exiting Egypt by the authorities in recent months.

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

- Urging the Egyptian authorities to immediately revoke their decision to close El Nadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence;
- Calling on them to lift all travel bans and asset freezes imposed upon human rights defenders and other NGO staff for exercising their right to freedom of association;
- Urging them to pass a new law on associations that is in line with international standards and the Egyptian Constitution, and grant NGOs a reasonable grace period to register under this new law.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 MAY 2016 TO:

Minister of Social Solidarity
Her Excellency Ghada Waly
Ministry of Social Solidarity
19 Maraghi Street
Giza, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 794 8257 / +202 3 337 5390
Salutation: Your Excellency

Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister
Mahy Hassan Abdel Latif
Deputy Assistant Minister for Human
Rights and NGO Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 574 9713
Email: contact.us@mfa.gov.eg
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
President of the National Council for
Human Rights
Mohamed Fayek
69 Giza St. – next to the Embassy of
Saudi Arabia
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 3 762 4852

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.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

El Nadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence has been registered since 1993 and has provided hundreds of torture victims with vital services, including counselling and legal assistance. The Egyptian authorities attempted to close El Nadeem Center for the second time this year on 5 April. Security forces had previously entered the offices on 17 February and presented staff with a closure order from the Health Ministry. The centre has continued to operate, despite the decision. On 24 February, Egypt's Health Ministry stated that the centre had violated its license by undertaking human rights advocacy. The centre responded that the Ministry's claims were inaccurate since it had the appropriate registration and government's decision was made after the publication of a report accusing the security forces of torture and other ill-treatment.

The criminal investigation into human rights groups has been ongoing since mid-2011, when Egypt's government opened an inquiry into the registration and funding of NGOs operating in the country. In December 2011, prosecutors accompanied by security forces raided five international NGOs and two Egyptian human rights organizations. In June 2013, a court sentenced 43 staff working for international NGOs to prison terms of between one and five years on charges of working at unregistered NGOs and of receiving illegal funding. All of the prison sentences were either suspended or issued in absentia.

Investigating judges continued the inquiry, focusing on Egyptian human rights organizations. The government also stepped-up the pressure on NGOs. In mid-July 2014 the Ministry of Social Solidarity ordered all NGOs to register under the Law on Associations (Law 84 of 2002). 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.

The crackdown has intensified in recent weeks. On 3 March, an investigating judge interrogated the director of the United Group, the lawyer Negad al-Borei. The law firm has represented victims of human rights violations and published reports on torture. Between 13 and 15 March, three employees of Nazra for Feminist Studies, two employees of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and one employee of the United Group were summonsed for questioning before the investigating judges. Mozn Hassan, the founder and director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, has also been summonsed for questioning.

A number of human rights defenders have also faced travel bans imposed by courts, prosecutors and security agencies. They include Hossam Baghat and Gamal Eid, who were both barred from travelling in February, as well as Mohamed Lotfy, the director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, who was prevented from travelling to Germany last June to address the country's parliament. In January 2015 the activist Esraa Abdel Fattah, who worked at the Egyptian Democratic Academy (EDA), was banned from travelling to Germany. Several EDA staff have also been prevented from travelling abroad.

Both the Law on Associations and the Penal Code criminalize accepting funding from international sources without government permission. Under Article 78 of the Penal Code, individuals may also face a 25-year prison sentence and a 500,000-Egyptian-pound fine (US\$56,300) for receiving money or materials for acts that would harm Egyptian "national interest", undermine the country's "territorial integrity" or disturb "the public peace". In March 2016, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed "grave concern" about the crackdown on Egyptian human rights groups. The commissioner also noted that: "Everyone has the right to receive funds to promote human rights through peaceful means". Egypt's laws restricting foreign funding have also been repeatedly criticized by UN bodies monitoring Egypt's compliance with international human rights treaties. The right to freedom of association is established under Article 75 of Egypt's Constitution and Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is a State Party.

Name: n/a

Gender m/f n/a:

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