

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ASSETS FROZEN

An Egyptian court has upheld an asset freeze against five human rights defenders and three NGOs. They may now face trial on spurious charges that include accepting funding illegally, operating unlicensed groups and damaging the country's "national security".

On 17 September a court in Cairo upheld an asset freeze against five human rights defenders and three human rights organizations, ordered by judges investigating the registration and funding of Egyptian NGOs as part of Case 173 of 2011, known as the "foreign funding case".

The decision by the Zeinoh Criminal Court names investigative journalist **Hossam Bahgat**; Arabic Network for Human Rights Information director **Gamal Eid**; Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies director **Bahey el-Din Hassan**; Hisham Mubarak Law Center director **Mostafa al-Hassan**; and Egyptian Center for the Right to Education director **Abdel Hafez Tayel**. The court also froze the assets of three groups, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Hisham Mubarak Law Center and the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education, but rejected orders freezing the assets of other NGO staff and the family members of some of the accused.

The five are likely to now face prosecution and trial, along with other Egyptian human rights defenders who are the subject of the same inquiry. They may face up to 25 years in prison and a fine of LE500,000 (US\$ 56,300) if convicted of the charge of accepting funding to damage Egypt's "national interests", "peace", "unity" or "security".

Egypt's government has also recently approved draft legislation which would further restrict NGOs' registration, activities and funding. The draft, which must be signed into law by the president, is undergoing judicial review.

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

- Calling on Egypt's authorities to ensure the asset freeze imposed on human rights defenders and organizations is immediately lifted;
- Urging them to end the harassment of human rights defenders, including the use of travel bans, asset freezes and closure orders, as well as to close spurious and politically motivated investigations;
- Calling on them to ensure that any new NGO law complies with Egypt's constitution, as well as international law and standards on the right to freedom of association.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 NOVEMBER 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

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Corniche al-Nil, Cairo

Arab Republic of Egypt

Fax: +202 2576 7967

Email: Contact.Us@mfa.gov.eg

Twitter: @MfaEgypt

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

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

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 fifth update of UA 81/16. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE12/4686/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Judges have stepped up a government-ordered inquiry into the registration status and funding of NGOs in the last six months, ordering asset freezes against leading human rights defenders and groups, interrogating NGO staff and banning several from travelling abroad. The moves come as part of an escalating crackdown on independent civil society by the Egyptian authorities, which has increasingly targeted human rights activists.

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.

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.

At least 12 NGO founders and staff have been banned from travel as part of the case, and as part of the wider crackdown. They include among others, Nazra for Feminist Studies director Mozn Hassan, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies Egypt director Mohamed Zaree, Arab Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession directors Nasser Amin and Hoda Abd el-Wahab, and Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms director Mohamed Lotfy. The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and its founder Hossam Bahgat are also part of the investigation in the "foreign-funding case".

The government has announced its plans to further tighten the laws regulating NGOs, approving new legislation in a cabinet meeting on 9 September. The legislation is aimed at replacing the existing associations law, passed in 2002, which already grants the authorities sweeping powers to deny NGOs' registration, block their funding and dissolve groups on vaguely defined grounds, such as threatening "national unity".

The investigation into human rights organizations and other NGOs dates from 2011, when it was ordered by the country's military government. The inquiry 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, a court tried 43 staff members of international groups 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 constitution and Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Freedom of movement is also guaranteed under Article 62 of the constitution and Article 12 of the ICCPR.

Name: Hossam Bahgat (m), Gamal Eid (m), Bahey el-Din Hassan (m), Mostafa al-Hassan (m), Abdel Hafez Tayel (m), Mozn Hassan (f), Hoda Abd el-Wahab (f), Mohamed Zaree (m), Ahmed Samih (m), and many other human rights defenders.

Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 81/16 Index: MDE 12/4859/2016 Issue Date: 20 September 2016