

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JOINT STATEMENT

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EGYPT: AUTHORITIES MUST REPEAL THE OUTRAGEOUS NGO LAW

In response to reports that the Egyptian government has decided to delay by six months the deadline requiring civil society organisations (CSOs) to register under the repressive 2019 NGO law by 11 January 2022 or face closure, the undersigned organisations reiterate their deep concern about the Law and its implementing regulations threatening the very survival of independent CSOs. The undersigned organisations call on the Egyptian parliament to repeal the NGO law and work with independent human rights organisations to adopt a new legislative framework upholding the right to freedom of association in accordance with international law and standards. Immediate international action is needed to protect Egypt's independent human rights movement, said the undersigned organisations after the authorities threatened to dissolve Egyptian NGOs unregistered under the repressive law.

Since its adoption, Egyptian and international organisations have repeatedly and widely denounced the 2019 NGO Law for violating the Egyptian Constitution and Egypt's obligations under international law to respect the right to freedom of association. This law empowers the government to deny registration to independent human rights organisations on vague grounds. Only "societal development" work aligned with the government's plans is authorised, and any civic work that the authorities consider to be "political," or violating "public order" or "morals" is forbidden. On 12 September 2021, the Egyptian Minister of Social Solidarity [declared](#) that CSOs had until 11 January 2022 to register under the Law or risked being dissolved.

For those CSOs that are allowed to register, the NGO Law empowers the Ministry of Social Solidarity to interfere in their work, activities, and funding. It allows authorities to enter premises without prior notice, inspect documents, challenge organisational decisions, and remove board members, among other restrictive measures. In effect, the law strips CSOs of their independence and prevents them from monitoring human rights abuses and holding officials accountable. The legislation further undermines CSOs' ability to cooperate with local, regional or foreign entities including international NGOs, treats their assets as public funds, and imposes excessive fines for violating its provisions. UN human rights experts [have voiced grave concern](#) that Egypt's NGO law and regulations are in violation of basic human rights norms, and severely undermines the ability of civil society to operate independently.

The requirement for CSOs to register under this draconian law comes amid the Egyptian authorities' broader crackdown on the human rights movement. The authorities continue to arbitrarily detain human rights defenders and civil society workers in squalid and punitive conditions of detention and subject others to unjust prosecutions, including by emergency courts. Furthermore, the decade-long criminal investigation into the activities and funding of NGOs (Case 173) is still ongoing. While authorities dropped investigations into 10 organizations, their directors and staff are still subject to travel bans and asset freezes, others remain under investigation with similar restrictions.

Human rights defenders targeted for their work include Hossam Bahgat, founder and executive director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights; Aida Seif al-Dawla, Magda Adly and Suzan Fayad, co-founders of the El-Nadeem Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture; Gamal Eid, director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information; and Mohamed Zaree, director of the Egypt office of the Cairo Institute for Human Right Studies (CIHRS). Separately, Bahey Eldin Hassan, director of CIHRS, was sentenced in absentia to 18 years in prison in retaliation for his human rights work. Ezzat Ghoniem, director of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, and human rights lawyer Hoda Abdelmoneim, are on trial by emergency courts. More recently, on 20 December 2021, Mohamed El-Baqer, human rights lawyer and founder of the Adala Center, was sentenced to four years in prison by an emergency court.

In light of these concerning developments and Egypt's long standing and well documented [pattern of reprisals](#) against human rights defenders, urgent action is required to avert the Egyptian government's attempts to annihilate the human rights movement in the country.

The undersigned organisations call on the international community including the United States, and the European Union and its Member States to make private and public statements urging the Egyptian authorities to withdraw the registration requirement, bring the legislative framework governing the work of NGOs in line with Egypt's international obligations and release all human rights defenders and NGO workers unjustly behind bars. They should also ensure that cooperation with Egypt includes benchmarks for freedom of association.

The protracted human rights crisis in Egypt also calls for the international community to support the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the human rights situation in the country at the upcoming United Nations Human Rights Council session of March 2022.

Signatories:

- Amnesty International
- Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies (AITAS)
- Belady-An Island for Humanity (BIH)
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
- CNCD 11.11.11
- Committee for Justice
- DIGNITY - Danish Institute Against Torture
- Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)
- Egyptian Human Rights Forum
- EuroMed Rights
- Global Focus
- Human Rights Watch
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- PEN International
- People in Need
- Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
- Sinai Foundation for Human Rights
- The Freedom Initiative