

Amnesty International (AI)
Article 19
Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH)
Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Egypt

The EU should break its Silence and Strongly Condemn the Attack on Civil Society

Appeal to the French Presidency of the EU, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission

The above mentioned human rights organisations hereby appeal to the EU institutions to speak out publicly concerning the Egyptian authorities' recent attacks on civil society, including the arrest and detention of Dr. Saad El-Din Ibrahim, Director of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Developmental Studies, and at least eight other members of the centre.

In recent months and years, the Egyptian authorities have increased efforts to muzzle civil society and have arrested and tried those who expressed strong criticism of government policies. Among recent developments illustrating this pattern, Hafez Abou Seada, Secretary General of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), was charged, in February 2000, under Military Decree N4/1992 with receiving funding without approval from authorities. On 30 July approval of the EOHR registration as an NGO was postponed for unspecified security reasons. The attack against the Ibn Khaldoun Center is yet another development of this strategy of intimidation of human rights defenders and other government critics.

Dr. Saad El-Din Ibrahim was arrested on 30 June under the State Emergency Law, accused, among other allegations, to have received foreign funding without permission of the authorities and to disseminate false information that damage Egypt's national interest. At least eight other staff members of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre were also arrested and files confiscated.

The EU has until now remained silent on this grave issue, despite the repeated extension of the detention without charge of Dr. Ibrahim (the latest on 27 July, the detention reaching a total of 45 days) and appeals by members of Egyptian civil society and international and national human rights organisations for action. This silence is unacceptable in light of the fact that the State Security Prosecutor has not been able to issue formal charges against Dr. Ibrahim, nor against those other staff members of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre who still remain under arrest.

The silence of the EU is even more regrettable since the charges of accepting foreign funding without permission of the authorities refer to, among others, the funds received by the Ibn Khaldoun Centre from EU's MEDA Democracy Program.

The European Union's lack of reaction runs counter to the recently adopted "Common Strategy on the Mediterranean" in which it is stressed that the European Union will work with its Mediterranean Partners to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also contradicts the spirit of the Barcelona Declaration, which acknowledges the importance of civil society in the development of societies and the forthcoming Association Agreement with Egypt, which states that the relationship between the partners should be based on respect for international human rights principles.

By keeping silent, the EU signals its acceptance of Egyptian government actions that gravely undermine freedom of association and impede the development of a free, vibrant and dynamic civil society in Egypt.

The European Union's continued silence will create a dangerous precedent, that will have serious negative effects on the whole region and undermine the credibility of the European Union as a partner for promoting and protecting human rights and civil society in the Mediterranean.

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