



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

fidh **OMCT**
SOS-Torture Network

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Egypt: Deterioration of the Human Rights Situation Continues after the Formation of the New Government

In view of the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 23 June, and the publication of the final report of the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM), the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) express grave concern over the continuing deterioration of the human rights situation in Egypt.

As mentioned in EOM's preliminary statement, elections in Egypt took place in a context where space for freedom of expression had been severely restricted, and all forms of dissent and criticism, including those of human rights organisation, have been stifled.

Despite the introduction of human rights guarantees in the country's new Constitution which acknowledges a number of human rights, recent developments have shown that state institutions continue to blatantly violate many human rights. The EU should remind these institutions of their national and international legal obligations, and call upon the new president and government to prioritise the protection and promotion of human rights.

Space for **freedom of assembly, association and expression** continues to shrink. Opposition figures, political activists, journalists and human rights defenders, supporters of the deposed President Mohamed Morsi and other dissidents, continue to be arbitrarily arrested. Government officials have acknowledged that authorities have detained at least 16,000 individuals, including 1,000 protesters since January 25, 2014. Many of those detained were rounded up solely for peacefully exercising their rights to free assembly, association, and expression, or for their alleged affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood.

On 21 June, the police arrested 30 activists protesting against the repressive Protest Law in the Heliopolis neighbourhood in Cairo. Some of the detainees reported ill-treatment, including beatings by police during the arrest and later at the police station. After investigations by National Security, officers 7 detainees were released, while the 23 others were kept in prison and presented before the prosecutor's office on Sunday. They were charged with breaching the protest law, destroying public property, participating in a march aiming at breaching public peace, possession of inflammable materials, and engaging in an act whose objective is to terrorise the public. Given these charges and recent similar cases, our organisations express their deep concern that the trial could result in disproportionate prison sentences. Among the detainees are two women human rights defenders: Yara Sallam of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, who was arrested near the protest area even though she was not taking part in it; and Sanaa Seif, a 18-years-old activist of the 'No to military trials' campaign and a sister of the activist Alaa Abdel Fattah.

On 15 June, Egyptian security forces confiscated the latest issue of Wasla, a magazine published by the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. They arrested a worker at the press where the publication was being printed, charging him with possession of publications that call for the overthrow of the regime and promote a terrorist organization. Similarly, on 22 May, security forces stormed the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights. These cases demonstrate a pattern of continued harassment of independent civil society groups.

Recent judicial practices cast serious doubts on the **independence of the judicial system** and on its ability to ensure accountability. In the last two months, first instance courts have issued death sentences for more than a thousand people allegedly responsible for the killing of two police officers.

Human rights defenders and civil society activists continue to be targeted through arbitrary legal proceedings. On 11 June 2014, the use of Egypt's judiciary to silence dissidents was demonstrated yet again. Prominent Egyptian activist Alaa Abdel Fattah and 24 others, charged with violating Egypt's Protest Law, were sentenced to 15 years of prison, five years of subsequent police surveillance and a fine of LE 100,000 (around 10.327€). Their hearing was held earlier than expected, preventing Mr. Abdel Fattah and the other defendants from attending.

The Foreign Affairs Council convenes almost a year since the mass killings of protesters on 14 August 2013 at Raba'a which followed the ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi. So far, Egyptian authorities have failed to hold police and army officers and officials **accountable** for the repeated use of excessive and lethal force. Despite declarations stating the opposite, prosecutors have failed to investigate any military or police officers for their unlawful use of force, while thousands of protesters have been detained for alleged violations of the new protest law.

Furthermore, despite a new law on sexual harassment, **violence against women** has been worsening especially in the public sphere, with dozens of cases of rape and sexual violence during protests. Such cases continue to be met with indifference, severely undermining women's participation in public life. The state has an obligation to protect participants in peaceful protests and especially to protect women from violence and discrimination.

In light of this, we call upon the Foreign Affairs Council and EU Election Observation Mission to address the above mentioned ongoing human rights abuses in its final report¹ and to urge the Egyptian authorities to:

- Ensure that the provisions of the new Constitution on fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and assembly, are fully implemented;
- Guarantee freedom of expression, assembly and association in general and especially during the current electoral period;
- Put an end to political harassment and arbitrary detention, including by dropping charges against and releasing all those detained solely for the exercise of their rights to free expression, association, and assembly, cease ongoing arrests and prosecution of demonstrators solely for exercising their right to freedom of opinion and assembly under the pretext of violating the assembly law and/or other legislations and stop detaining persons without charge or trial for expressing their opinion etc.;
- Engage in a genuine discussion with CSOs and legal experts on the law on public assemblies and protest as well as the draft law on associations, and ensure their conformity with international standards;
- Take decisive steps to end torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, including the reform of the security apparatus to ensure accountability for any abuse;
- Adopt national strategies for combating violence against women and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, ensuring the effective consultation and involvement of women's rights groups and other civil society organizations throughout the process;
- Ensure accountability for violations of human rights, including through an independent and impartial administration of justice.

1 The EOM mandate includes the assessment of the overall environment of the election "including respect for fundamental freedoms, civil and political rights" and the role of the civil society.