



Egypt's independent human rights community at risk of complete eradication

The undersigned organisations condemn unreservedly the asset freeze ruled on Saturday 17 September by the Cairo Criminal Court in Zeinoh on prominent human rights organisations and defenders in Egypt, as part of case no 173/2011, known as the “foreign funding case”.

Prominent human rights organisations and human rights defenders were particularly targeted: the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) and its director Bahey el din Hassan, the Hisham Mubarak Law Center (HMLC) and its director Mostafa El Hassan, the Center for the Right to Education and its executive director Abdel Hafiz Tayel, as well as human rights defenders Hossam Bahgat and Gamal Eid.

The personal assets of the five human rights defenders are frozen and three NGOs CIHRS, HMLC and the Center for the Right to Education, are losing access to their bank accounts and their properties. The management of these NGOs’ finances and programmes are to be handed over to government officials, giving them control their activities and full access to their records and database, including files related to victims of human rights violations.

This asset freeze is a further step within the judicial proceedings of the foreign funding case, which has also led to the imposition of travel bans on prominent and respected human rights defenders, tax investigations against independent human rights NGOs and repeated interrogations of their staff by investigative judges.

Prosecuting Egypt’s independent human rights movement will lead to the permanent closure of human rights NGOs — the most credible, independent and one of the few remaining voices critical of the government’s policies — and the sentencing of their workers on heavy charges, of which some carry sentences of life imprisonment.

This is part of a larger crackdown, not only on human rights defenders, but also on the media, trade unions and peaceful protesters, which will further worsen the ongoing closure of the public sphere and of civil society space. Continued attacks on the rule of law, absence of accountability and a crisis of governance have caused increasing unrest.

Civil society is an indispensable pillar in any reform process, if there is to be any hope of its success. In Egypt, as elsewhere in the world, the rising threat of terrorism only increases the vital need for a free and active civil society, as a national partner to propose reform and policy recommendations, and as an intermediary with society, playing a crucial role to help stabilise Egypt and reinforce its security.

The international community should raise the following points with the Egyptian authorities, especially in the context of the UN general assembly currently taking place:

- Egyptian authorities should immediately withdraw this asset freeze and all other measures under the foreign funding case, including travels bans and spurious tax investigations. They

should close the case definitively and pardon the persons sentenced in the same case in 2013.

- Egyptian authorities should start a sincere, open and inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders, including independent human rights groups, about the role and status of national civil society; and thoroughly review the legal framework for registration and funding of civil society organisations based on the outcome of this dialogue.

Concerning the EU and its Member States, we urge them to:

- Raise this matter immediately with the Egyptian authorities, to convey the need for the foreign funding case to be closed forthwith and associated measures withdrawn so as to allow the survival of Egypt's independent human rights movement.
- Make the closure of the foreign funding case a condition for the pursuit and conclusion of the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities and the holding of an Association Council. As indicated in the EEAS spokesperson's statement of 17 September, Egypt is not respecting the commitments it entered into by signing the EU-Egypt Association agreement. Consequently, relations between the EU and Egypt should not progress to an ulterior stage.
- Ensure, with the support of like-minded states and civil society organisations, the delivery of a cross-regional joint statement at the 34th Session of the UN Human Rights Council to address the human rights situation in Egypt.

Signatories

EuroMed Rights

IFEX

ARCI

International Service For Human Rights (ISHR)

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

People in Need (Člověk v tísni, o. p. s.)

CIVICUS

Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

CNCD 11.11.11

Reporters Without Borders

FIDH, in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

SOLIDAR

Front Line Defenders

World Organisation Against torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders