

## [Egypt: Release human rights defenders and peaceful protesters immediately and unconditionally](#)

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(Geneva) - The International Service for Human Rights strongly condemns the conviction of Egyptian activists and other individuals on 26 October on charges of breaching a draconian anti-protest law and other baseless accusations.

Twenty three individuals - either targeted solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly or random bystanders picked up in the vicinity of the dispersed 21 June protest - were sentenced to three years in prison, an additional three years of police surveillance, a fine of USD1400 and repayment for property damages they allegedly caused.

The charges relate to a demonstration on 21 June against the repressive anti-protest law (Law 107/2013), which was forcibly dispersed by security forces aided by unknown assailants at the time. The charges include breaching the anti-protest law and other trumped-up charges, such as vandalism and 'displaying force'.

'Egypt's protest law is extremely restrictive and falls far short of meeting international human rights standards. Civil society across the world have repeatedly expressed their concern over the systematic misuse of this law and other related legislation to silence dissent by disproportionately targeting human rights defenders, journalists, political activists and opposition figures' said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

Among the defendants were [seven women human rights defenders](#), including prominent activist Yara Sallam, the transitional justice officer at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and winner of the 2013 North African Shield for her work with another Egyptian NGO, Nazra for Feminist Studies.

Prior to their conviction, the defendants had been held in pre-trial detention since their arrest on 21 June. The trial, which was originally set for 13 September, was adjourned twice (first until 11 October and finally 16 October) with the defendants remaining behind bars.

'The judge repeatedly rejected requests for provisional release, despite the absence of any legal justification meriting pre-trial detention such as national security concerns or fear of defendants tampering with evidence or intimidating witness,' said Khaled Mansour, Executive Director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

'Extended pre-trial detention, in circumstances that are clearly incompatible with international law, is increasingly used as a punitive measure by the Egyptian authorities to silence human rights defenders and

activists,’ said Mr Lynch. ‘It sends a chilling message that no criticism of the Egyptian government will be tolerated’.

The conviction of Yara Sallam and other human rights defenders comes as a coalition of international human rights organisations wrote an [open letter to Member and Observer States at the UN Human Rights Council](#) calling on them to collectively speak out against the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt. As the Egyptian government gears up to have its human rights record reviewed by the UN on 5 November, through the Universal Periodic Review, NGOs have called on States to stand with civil society in calling for an end to repression and attacks against human rights defenders and to ensure accountability for past violations, including the grossly excessive use of force against protesters.

In addition to the open letter, ISHR has also prepared a [Briefing Paper on the situation of human rights defenders in Egypt](#), with proposed questions and recommendations for States to make to Egypt on the issue.

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