

[Egypt: States and HRC must act to end harassment of independent civil society](#)

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(Update - 11 April 2016) - Three UN experts have added their voice to international alarm at the 'continuing crackdown on human rights defenders and civil society organisations in Egypt'.

The experts warned that 'many NGOs have been closed down, and human rights defenders have been interrogated by the security forces, subjected to travel bans and had their assets frozen in retaliation for their legitimate and peaceful human rights work'.

'Egypt is failing to provide a safe and enabling environment for civil society in the country. The Government must immediately put an end to all forms of persecution and take effective measures to protect civil society,' the UN experts on human rights defenders, freedom of expression, and freedoms of assembly and association said.

The civil society actors targeted include leading, independent NGOs and close ISHR partners Nazra for Feminist Studies, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, among others.

The public statement by Special Procedures followed a similar call by both the High Commissioner for Human Rights and [14 international NGOs](#), including ISHR, issued last month, together with [earlier statements at the Human Rights Council](#) by ISHR and Human Rights Watch.

Following the statement by the Special Procedures, ISHR Director Phil Lynch said, 'With both national and international human rights organisations and experts sounding the alarm bell, it is imperative that democratic governments condemn the current crackdown and send a very clear message through both words and foreign policy measures that its continuation is not in Egypt's political or economic interests.'

'States should unequivocally condemn the recent escalation of the civil society crackdown and make clear that any support for Egypt's government is conditional on respect for fundamental human rights,' Mr Lynch said.

The full statement by Special Procedures is as follows:

UN experts urge Egypt to end ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders and organisations

(11 April 2016) - Three United Nations human rights experts today raised alarm at the continuing

crackdown on human rights defenders and civil society organisations in Egypt. They warned that many NGOs have been closed down, and human rights defenders have been interrogated by the security forces, subjected to travel bans and had their assets frozen in retaliation for their legitimate and peaceful human rights work.

“Egypt is failing to provide a safe and enabling environment for civil society in the country,” the UN experts on human rights defenders, freedom of expression, and freedoms of assembly and association said. “The Government must immediately put an end to all forms of persecution and take effective measures to protect civil society.”

The rights experts reiterated their call on the Egyptian authorities to amend Law 84/2002 on Non-Governmental Organizations without delay, which remains in force despite widespread criticism.

“The recent attempt to forcibly close the Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence demonstrates how Egypt’s NGO Law is being used to obstruct the reporting on human rights issues, such as torture,” explained the experts.

The Center was issued with a closing order on 17 February 2016 for publishing reports on torture, which is deemed a ‘medical activity’ for which it is not licensed. The organisation resisted an attempt to forcibly close it on 5 April 2016 and may now be subject to legal proceedings.

“We are also seriously alarmed by the interrogation of several human rights defenders and the risk that they may face in detention or prosecution for their work, as well as the improper use of travel bans and asset freezing,” the independent experts stressed.

Members of human rights organisations, including the Nazra for Feminist Studies, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and the United Group - Attorneys at Law and Legal Advisors, have all been subject to interrogation. Many of them were threatened with arrest warrants and prosecutions if they did not comply. Others face charges of ‘receiving foreign funds for illegal purposes’ and ‘working without registration’, punishable by fines and life imprisonment.

The UN experts also drew attention to the travel bans issued against several human rights defenders, including members of the Arab Network for Human Rights and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. “Such bans must be lifted straight away,” they emphasised.

ENDS

(Update - 23 March 2016) - The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has joined ISHR and [14 international NGOs](#) in expressing 'grave concern over the closure of hundreds of civil society organisations in Egypt and the prosecutions of numerous human rights defenders for their legitimate work since November 2014'.

In a [statement on Egypt](#) issued today. High Commissioner Zeid said, This looks like a clampdown on sections of Egyptian civil society and it must stop...Egyptian civil society activists should be lauded for their dedicated efforts to promote human rights under such difficult circumstances. Laws that impose undue restrictions on NGO registration and funding - as well as freedom of expression and association - must be amended to create a more tolerant atmosphere.'

(Geneva - 19 March 2016) - Democratic governments, the UN Human Rights Council and its Special Rapporteurs should strongly pressure Egypt to end the crackdown on independent civil society organisations, unequivocally condemning the recent escalation and making clear that any support for Egypt’s government is conditional on respect for fundamental human rights.

The targeting and repression of Egyptian civil society organisations, particularly human rights organisations, [ongoing for at least three years](#), has dramatically worsened over the last few weeks and months.

ISHR is particularly concerned at reports that this crackdown is likely to further escalate over the coming days and weeks, with the real risk of prosecution of the country's leading defenders and closure of the leading human rights organisations. This concern is based on a significant increase in State activity to restrict, criminalise and end their operations over the last six weeks, including:

- the summoning and threatened arrest and prosecution of staff of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Nazra for Feminist Studies and the United Group for judicial questioning in relation to 'foreign funding';
- the imposition of arbitrary and unlawful travel bans and asset freezes against Gamal Eid, the Director of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information, and Hossam Bahgat, the founder and a Board member of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights; and
- the [closure of the Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence](#) on 17 February.

This recent activity comes on top of other recent acts of intimidation, restriction and reprisal against human rights defenders and NGOs, including:

- [raiding and investigating other leading national NGOs](#), including the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights and the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre;
- accusing leading international human rights NGO, Human Rights Watch, of 'promoting', 'supporting' and 'endorsing' terrorism and terrorist operations; and
- [imprisoning leading women human rights defenders](#) and others involved in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

ISHR's concerns are shared by a range of other actors, including Amnesty International, who [said](#) that the move to freeze NGO and defender assets and to investigate foreign funding sources are 'yet another blatant attempt to paralyse civil society in Egypt that leaves no doubt as to the government's resolve to crush freedom of expression and association'. They were also the subject of a [joint statement delivered in the Human Rights Council](#) on 21 March by Human Rights Watch on behalf of ISHR and other leading international and regional human rights NGOs.

In a [statement](#), US Secretary of State John Kerry similarly said that the reopening of the foreign funding investigation should be seen in the context of the 'wider backdrop of arrests and intimidation of political opposition, journalists, civil society activists and cultural figures'.

'Restrictions on the space for civil society activity will produce neither stability nor security' in Egypt, Secretary of State Kerry said.

'The human rights movement in Egypt faces unprecedented risk, with the most credible and effective organisations facing closure and the most courageous and independent defenders facing the risk of charges that carry a sentence of life imprisonment,' said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

ISHR calls on the UN Human Rights Council and its Special Procedure mandate holders, together with democratic governments, to condemn the current crackdown and send a very clear message that its continuation is not in Egypt's political or economic interests.

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