

[NGO Forum | Poor treatment of civil society organisations during the NGO Forum](#)

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On 22 April NGOs gathered at the NGO Forum submitted [a petition letter](#) to the Chair of the African Commission, Hon. Commissioner Soyata Maiga. The letter outlines the restrictions defenders have faced to exercise their rights to participate in the 64th ordinary session of the African Commission as well as the NGO Forum which precedes it. In November, a group of NGOs had already share their [concerns](#) with the Chair about the session being organised in Egypt. Indeed, the ongoing human rights violations being committed by the government against defenders did not provide any confidence in Egypt being able to ensure the unhindered access for defenders to the session, especially the local ones and their safety. Recent events only prove that civil society organisations had legitimate concerns which only proved to be true.

Indeed, despite early applications for visas submitted by civil society delegates to the NGO Forum and the 64th Session and in spite of full assurances received from representatives of the Government of Egypt, a good number of prospective delegates were not granted visas. As mentioned in the letter, more than 70 activists from a number of countries including Ghana, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and Uganda amongst others were either denied visas or were only granted visas on or after their indicated travel dates.

In addition to the difficulties faced ahead of the session, those who were able to travel to Sharm El Sheikh had to overcome new challenges going, for two specific cases, as far as physical threats against two women human rights defenders by Egyptian officials. Contrary to the usual custom, identification badges for the 64th session are being issued by officials from the Arab republic of Egypt rather than the secretariat of the ACHPR. This other derogation went a long way to undermine the independence of the commission and intimidated especially Egyptian defenders to participate in the session.

As a voluntary host of the 64th Session of the African Commission the Government of Egypt owes an equal and even higher duty to allow unobstructed participation by national and international civil society actors. During this session, NGOs have been denied the possibility to organise parallel events within the Conference Centre where the African Commission's session and NGO Forum were taking place as well as hotels in close surrounding. The denial of these facilities reinforce reports of the firmness with which the Government of Egypt crushes dissent, discourages public participation in public affairs and punishes people who dare to claim basic human rights.

The letter notes the near absence of Egyptian NGOs and CSOs at these forums and the difficulties experienced by continental civil society actors which is unacceptable and deserves condemnation in the strongest terms. The clamp down of the media in Egypt and the various other means by which the civic space is reduced raises credible concerns on the motivation for hosting the Session in Egypt.

Finally the letter calls on the African Commission to seriously consider and raise these concerns with the State

of Egypt in the consideration of its Country Report during the session. It is important that the commission takes all necessary measures to ensure that human rights violations in Egypt are not overlooked by this half-hearted offer of the government to host the 64th commission.

Read the full letter [here](#).

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