

UN Human Rights Council – 43rd regular session
Item 6: Adoption of the report on the UPR of Egypt
Oral statement

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Madam President,

During its UPR, the Government of Egypt has maintained that it supports the free functioning of independent civil society organizations (CSOs). This is at variance with the truth.

CSOs are subject to highly restrictive legislation. Within case No.173/2011 (the “foreign funding case”) Egyptian CSOs and human rights defenders (HRDs) remain under a multitude of restrictions stifling their activity: at least 28 travel bans, 10 asset freezes against HRDs and 7 against CSOs.

Egypt should immediately end reprisals against HRDs and allow them to travel and participate freely in UN proceedings. On 23 April 2020, a court ruling is expected on travel bans; it is crucial for the ruling to bring justice to HRDs.

Civil society at large is under the chilling effect of a sharp escalation of arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances of HRDs, like Zyad el-Elaimy and WHRD Mahienour el Massry, within a vast crackdown on peaceful dissent. Minority rights advocates, from LGBT rights defenders Malak el Kashef and Eman el Helw, to Coptic rights defender Ramy Kamel, have not been spared. Egypt received dozens of recommendations to address unlawful detentions, attacks against freedoms of expression, assembly and association, restrictions on civil society and reprisals against HRDs.

Egypt’s use of torture and ill-treatment in detention was also addressed in the UPR. More than ten countries called on Egypt to investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment against detainees and hold perpetrators accountable. Renowned HRDs including Mohamed el Baqer, Alaa Abdelfattah, Patrick Zaki, Ramy Kamel and WHRDs Ms Esraa Abdelfattah and Solafa Magdy were victims of torture and abuse. The trend is now enforced disappearance before detention; HRD Ibrahim Ezz-el-din, also tortured, did not reappear before 167 days.

But Egypt’s attacks against human rights norms and protections do not stop at home. They do not stop at this Council (with attempts to redefine concepts, occupy the space, dilute State obligations, and justify rights violations). Egypt’s destructive behaviour now extends to the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).

In April 2019, at the NGO Forum organised ahead of the ACHPR's 64th session in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egyptian authorities placed severe restrictions on participants, denying visas, threatening and intimidating HRDs, forcing the conference centre and hotels to demand exorbitant fees to hold side events, and cutting access to the Internet. Egyptian security agents even physically assaulted two South Sudanese WHRDs.

This behaviour is in clear violation of Article 11 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly of the African Commission. The Commission's Chair expressed regret and apologies to civil society; however, Egypt's attacks against the integrity of the Commission and its mandate continue.

African States should stand up to Egypt's anti-rights agenda, both on the continent and here in Geneva.

Thank you for your attention.