

Egypt: New crackdown to terrorise civil society

Paris-Geneva, July 23, 2019 - At least 83 persons, including political opposition activists, journalists and human rights defenders, have been arrested in Egypt over terrorist charges since June 25 for their alleged implication in a plot against the State. FIDH, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) denounce this new crackdown and call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately end any act of harassment, including at the judicial level, against all peaceful activists, in particular political opponents and human rights defenders in Egypt.

Former member of Parliament and human rights lawyer **Zyad al-Elaimy** was arrested on June 25, 2019 by a dozen of plainclothes national security agents after leaving a friend's house in Cairo's Maadi district, around 2 a.m. Seven other political opposition figures were arrested on the same night. In a statement, the Ministry of Interior abusively accused Mr. Zyad al-Elaimy and the other detainees of involvement in a plan financed through leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood - which was banned and declared a terrorist organisation in Egypt in 2013 - abroad "to carry out violent and disorderly acts against State institutions simultaneously with creating a state of revolutionary momentum".

"Mr. Zyad al-Elaimy was involved in the creation of a movement bringing together political parties and social movements on a pro human rights agenda", said Neil Hicks, Senior Director for Advocacy at CIHRS. The Egyptian authorities, relayed by the official media, have renamed it the "Hope Plan", and wrongly accused its alleged supporters of terrorism and undermining State security.

The pre-trial detention of Mr. Zyad al-Elaimy and the other detainees has been renewed by the State Security Prosecution since then, pending investigation into State Security case No. 930/2019, in which the defendants face charges of "engaging with a terrorist group to achieve its goals" and "spreading false news and statements".

Mr. Zyad al-Elaimy was detained incommunicado for 14 days following his arrest, and is now detained in Tora prison, where his conditions of detention negatively impact on his health: while being asthmatic and suffering from high blood pressure and a rare immunity disease, he is currently held in a 4.8m² room with two other inmates, with only a small window in the cell, attached to the ceiling.

"We strongly condemn the arbitrary arrest and judicial harassment of Mr. Zyad al-Elaimy and other wrongfully detained activists, which seems to be only aimed at sanctioning them for the legitimate exercise of their political rights. We call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately release all the detainees", said Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General.

Moreover, our organisations were also informed about the arbitrary arrest at the end of June/beginning of July of several human rights defenders under State Security case No. 930/2019: Mr. **Hassan Barbary**, Executive Director of the Egyptian Labour Relations Forum, Mr. **Ahmad Taman**, an ILO consultant and researcher at the Egyptian Labour Relations Forum, and Mr. **Alaa Essam**, accountant of the same organisation. The three are currently detained and under asset freeze. Ms. **Fatma Ramadan**, a researcher in labour affairs and independent trade unionist, is also under asset freeze.

"This new wave of arrest is symptomatic of the wider trend of harassment and arbitrary detentions targeting political activists and human rights defenders in Egypt, which materialized over the past months with the re-arrest of Mr. Haytham Mohamadein, the arrest and subsequent release of Ms. Malak al-Kashif, the ongoing enforced disappearance of Mr. Ibrahim Ezz El-Din and the ongoing arbitrary detention of, among others, Messrs. Mohamed Ramadan and Shadi al-Ghazali", concluded Alexandra Poméon, Head of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders at FIDH.

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