

Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary for Human Rights  
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor - U.S. Department of State

March 28, 2016

Dear Mr. Malinowski:

As advocates on behalf of women's and gender rights worldwide, we want to express our deep concern about the recent escalation in Egypt of government attacks on dozens of civil society organizations that work for human rights and particularly women's rights. Two organizations with which we are involved and whose leaders we know and admire, have come under intensified harassment in the past weeks: Nazra for Feminist Studies and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). Leaders of these groups have been charged with illegally receiving foreign funds and subjected to travel bans, asset freezes, and summonses for interrogation. We strongly urge your office to take action on their behalf.

Time is a major concern here for us, as Mozn Hassan, who has headed Nazra for Feminist Studies since its founding in 2007, is due to be formally questioned tomorrow, Tuesday, March 29, by the "Case 173" magistrates. The Case 173 category involves charges of "receipt of foreign funding for an illegal purpose." Three of Nazra's staff members were questioned last week. As a New York Times editorial on Saturday emphasized, the purpose of this crackdown is to put groups like Nazra and EIPR, who are among "the country's top defenders of human rights" and most credible and independent Egyptian NGOs, "out of business." But it also inflicts cruel and unjustifiable punishment on individuals who are merely expressing their civil and human rights to peaceful speech, expression and dissent. The case of Mozn Hassan requires **immediate and urgent intervention**, as she may be facing detention and long imprisonment.

Also of grave concern is the persecution of two very well known and respected Egyptian activists, Hossam Baghat, a co-founder of EIPR and prominent journalist, and Gamal Eid, founder of the press freedom group, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI). Both (and Gamal Eid's wife and daughter) were recently subjected to an "assets freeze" and are under travel bans. They are also threatened with long prison sentences. The magistrates have ridiculously accused Baghat of "harming national security, spreading instability in Egypt, encouraging a state of chaos and a security breakdown, encouraging rifts within Egyptian society and the failure of the Egyptian regime," according to a press release issued by Amnesty International.

Other organizations have also been targeted recently by the same body consisting of three Cairo Court of Appeals magistrates who have been pursuing human rights groups as a part of "Case 173" since 2011. These include the Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of violence (served with a closure order in February); the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, the Egyptian Democratic Academy, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, and the law firm United Group. These groups play a vital role in Egyptian civil society and are the only ones that systematically document human rights abuses and call attention to widespread incidents of gender based and sexual violence.

As an ally, a supporter of democracy, and as a major donor to Egypt, the U.S. needs to convince the el-Sisi regime that the U.S. will not stand by while Egypt becomes a military police state. "The Egyptian authorities have moved beyond scaremongering and are now rapidly taking concrete steps to shut down the last critical voices in the country's human rights community," Nadim Houry, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, has written. The New York Times editorial of March 26 ("Time to Rethink Relations With Egypt") goes even further in urging President Obama to "start planning for the possibility of a break in the alliance with Egypt" based on its extreme human rights violations. We strongly agree with this prescription and even believe it may be required under U.S. and international law.

More specifically, the U.S. should demand that Egypt comply with the pledges it made when accepting Egypt's UPR recommendations in March 2015 at the UN Human Rights Council. This means that

--Egypt needs to halt the ongoing investigation of independent human rights organizations and close the "foreign funding" cases once and for all. All travel bans and asset freezes that were arbitrarily ordered against human rights defenders need to be lifted.

--The Egyptian courts should grant NGOs a grace period of one year to register under a new associations law that would comply with Article 75 of the Egyptian Constitution, which allows groups to be recognized and funded by notification, and invite NGO participation in consultations on the drafting of this new associations law.

--Egypt must withdraw the arbitrary administrative decision by the Ministry of Health to close down the Nadeem Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture and Violence.

Strong intervention by your office could make a real difference here and help to persuade President Obama to take decisive action.

Sincerely,

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