

15 November 2016

Egypt – Intensifying crackdown on Egyptian Human Rights Movement

Between 10 and 15 November, the crackdown on the Egyptian human rights movement has escalated. On 15 November, human rights defender Mr **Ahmed Ragheb** was told by Egyptian passport control officials at Cairo International Airport that he was banned from travelling to Morocco to participate in the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 22) of the United Nations Climate Change Conference. On 14 November, a highly restrictive draft NGO law was proposed for discussion by 204 Egyptian parliamentarians and passed its first reading. And finally, on 10 November, **El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture** was informed that the Egyptian authorities had instructed Crédit Agricole Bank to block the organisation's account until its status conformed to law 84/2002.

[Ahmed Ragheb](#) is an Egyptian lawyer and founder of the **National Community for Human Rights and Law (NCHRL)** an organisation that works to defend human rights surrounding popular movements in Egypt that are promoting human rights and social justice. In July 2012, the human rights lawyer was appointed by former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi as a member of a fact-finding mission to investigate deaths following protests in Egypt that began on 25 January 2011. [El Nadeem Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture](#) is an independent Egyptian non-governmental organisation founded in 1993. El Nadeem Centre provides social support and medical care for victims of torture, and is the only centre in Egypt which provides specialized psychological support to survivors of violence in detention centres. The organisation carries out advocacy and issues monthly summary reports on instances of torture, medical negligence and death in police custody in Egypt. El Nadeem Centre also runs a program addressing violence against women, which provides counselling along with maintaining two 24-hour hot-lines.

On 15 November, Ahmed Ragheb was informed by Egyptian passport control that he is banned from travelling by virtue of a judicial order issued against him in May 2016 by an investigative judge. The order was issued without the human rights defender's knowledge and without known charges against him. The defender was en route to Marrakesh, Morocco to attend COP 22. The decision to ban Ahmed Ragheb from travelling is the sixth of its kind with five other travel bans having been issued in relation to the foreign funding case, also known as Case No. 173. Since 2011, 37 Egyptian rights organisations have faced charges in the foreign funding case, with some leaders and staff members of human rights organizations charged with "receipt of illegal foreign funding" and "working without legal permission". In connection with this case, an Egyptian court approved on [17 September 2016](#) a freeze on the assets of five prominent human rights defenders and three leading human rights NGOs. Also in connection with this case, five other human rights defenders were banned from travel in a wave of harassment against the Egyptian human rights movement earlier in [May 2016](#).

The travel ban on Ahmed Ragheb coincides with a massive and unprecedented judicial harassment campaign against the Egyptian human rights movement. On 14 November, a highly restrictive [draft NGO law](#) was proposed for discussion by 204 Egyptian parliamentarians and passed its first reading. The proposed law threatens to imprison human rights defenders and NGO staff from one to five years and fine them between EGP50,000 and EGP1,000,000 if they inter alia facilitate or participate in activities carried out by international organisations without authorisation of the Egyptian authorities, or

if they carry out field research and public polls in their capacity as civil society without prior consent. The proposed law would also grant Egyptian authorities control over the establishment of Egyptian NGOs and would also require international NGOs to register with Egyptian authorities. The draft law also gives Egyptian authorities the power to dictate the location and headquarters of civil society operations, and proposes to imprison human rights defenders for up to one year and fine them between EGP20,000 and EGP500,000 for carrying out “crimes” such as moving the headquarters of the organisation to a place other than what had been previously authorised. The proposed law also places individual liability on government staff members that authorise the work of NGOs in contravention with the aforementioned draft law.

In the continued crackdown on human rights organisations in Egypt, on 10 November, El Nadeem Centre was subjected to a new wave of restrictive measures that prohibited its staff from accessing the organisation's bank account due to “non-conformity with law 84/2002”. The Law 84/2002 on Non-Governmental Organizations (Associations and Non-Governmental Institutions) regulates the establishment and functioning of NGOs, and provides the Egyptian Government’s Executive branch with several means and avenues to exercise control over the work of NGOs, including restricting their access to foreign funding and their ability to join international associations. It also provides the government with wide powers of dissolution. This is not the first time that El Nadeem have been the target of the ongoing campaign against civil society and human rights defenders by Egyptian authorities. On [17 February 2016](#), officials from the Azbakeyya district authorities carried out an administrative order (35/2016) to close down the non-governmental organisation based on a decision signed by the Ministry of Health on 8 February 2016 and approved by the Cairo district authorities on 15 February 2016 alleging that El Nadeem had been in breach of their “licence conditions.”

Front Line Defenders condemns the criminalization of civil society in Egypt, including through the imposition of travel bans, the blocking of human rights organisations’ bank accounts and the freezing of their assets. Front Line Defenders calls for an immediate end to the persecution of human rights defenders, reiterating their essential role in the development of a just and equal society, and is also deeply concerned by the new restrictive draft NGO law currently being discussed in Parliament.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Egypt to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally remove the travel ban imposed against Ahmed Raghed and all other human rights defenders facing travel restrictions in Egypt, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being restricted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Refrain from adopting the draft NGO law introduced on 14 November before the Egyptian Parliament as it would severely hamper the work of human rights organisations in Egypt;
3. Retract the order to block the bank accounts of El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture as Front Line Defenders believes the organisation has been targeted solely as a result of its legitimate human rights activities;
4. Put an end to the ongoing campaign against El Nadeem Center and other human rights organisations in Egypt, and drop all charges and measures against them, including the blocking of their bank account

and administrative orders;

5. Cease targeting all human rights organisations and human rights defenders in Egypt and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.