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EGYPT: AN OPEN-AIR PRISON FOR CRITICS

The Egyptian authorities have maintained and intensified the latest crackdown on dissent, which started in December 2017 ahead of the presidential elections, Amnesty International said. Over the past 10 months, security forces have arbitrarily arrested and detained at least 111 people solely for peacefully expressing critical opinions about the authorities or for calling for or participating in protests or political gatherings. At least 70 of them remain imprisoned, facing charges that carry prison sentences of up to 15 years.

The crackdown has targeted a broad range of free and independent voices, including political, media, and comedy critics, highlighting the Egyptian authorities' zero tolerance approach to any form of dissent. At least 28 journalists have been arrested since December 2017, while four lawyers have been detained simply for doing their jobs in defending victims of human rights violations. Two former presidential candidates and dozens of political activists languish in jail.

Social media platforms have been transformed into traps. Many of those who have been detained in the crackdown have been convicted on the basis of screenshots of critical comments they made on social media. Comics and satirists are among those who have been targeted, including at least two individuals who posted satirical commentary online and were arrested by the police under the pretext of "violating public decency" or other vaguely defined offenses. A new law passed in August 2018 now allows for the criminal prosecution of individual social media users who have more than 5000 followers.

The crackdown has also swept up people who participated in small peaceful protests about the rising cost of transportation, people who posted on their Facebook profiles about sexual harassment and people who shared satirical videos, highlighting how risky it is to make even innocuous criticism online or on the streets. On 12 May, the police violently dispersed a peaceful protest against increased metro fares, arresting at least 35 individuals on charges of "unauthorized protest" and "joining a terrorist group."

The Sisi administration has been ruthless in its pursuit of any potential political competitors or high-profile political figures. In the run up to the elections of March 2018, Egyptian authorities rounded up many senior political figures for publicly criticizing the president or for running against him. In January 2018, security forces arrested Sami Anan, the military's former chief of staff, after he had announced his intention to run in the presidential elections. In February, the police arrested the founder of the Misr Al-Qawia political party, Abdelmonim Aboufotouh, on charges of membership in a terrorist group and publishing false information, in relation to media interviews he gave to the satellite stations Al Jazeera and Al Araby TV. On 12 April, the authorities referred Egypt's former top auditor, Hisham Genina, to military trial, after he criticized the president in a media interview. He was sentenced to five years in prison. In these media interviews, the targeted political opponents had each rejected violence, stressed their commitment to peaceful opposition and criticized President al-Sisi's blatant attack on human rights.

The crackdown on freedom of expression has further insulated state institutions from public scrutiny, facilitating further human rights violations and impunity. In addition, since the start of 2018, the authorities have punished peaceful opposition as "terrorism" on a scale not seen even during former President Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule, Amnesty International said.

In several of his speeches, President Abdelfattah al-Sisi frequently warns of unspecified conspiracies to destroy the state. In January 2018 alone, al-Sisi made two speeches warning against "forces of evil" that want to harm Egypt. That month, as security forces intensified their crackdown on freedom of expression, the president warned that "what happened seven years ago will not happen again," in an apparent reference to the January 2011 uprising that led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak. The following month in February 2018, Egypt's public prosecutor issued a statement instructing

prosecutors to take legal action against anyone who publishes any content online they deem to be “harmful to national security,” calling those who publicly criticize the authorities “forces of evil.”

Prosecutors are constantly abusing the criminal justice system to target and harass journalists, human rights activists and members of the opposition solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. They have appealed judicial release orders, in many cases insisting on the long-term pre-trial detention of detainees.

Prosecutors have most often charged dissenters with the overbroad and ill-defined offence of “publishing false information for the purposes of harming national security” or for “membership in a terrorist group” or a “banned group”, without offering any evidence of their affiliation with an armed group or even providing the name of the group they allegedly joined, thereby conflating peaceful and legitimate activities with terrorism. “Spreading false information” cannot be a crime, since it is not a legitimate restriction on freedom of expression as was recently reiterated in a 2017 joint [communication](#) by UN and Regional Special Rapporteurs on Fake News, Disinformation and Propaganda.

Journalists have been tried in the regular court system and military tribunals and have been sentenced to up to five years in prison. Since December 2017, prosecutors have ordered the detention of at least 28 journalists and documentary filmmakers. Most of the detained journalists worked for online media outlets, worked with critical media outlets based outside the country, interviewed opposition leaders or critically covered the 2018 presidential elections. On 3 April 2018, police forces stormed the office of the news website Masr al-Arabia and arrested its editor-in-chief.

As part of the crackdown, Egyptian authorities continue to block at least 504 websites, including those of Egyptian and international human rights groups, news platforms and political opposition groups. without any clear legal basis or judicial oversight. The president has approved three laws on media and one on cybercrime that allow for mass censorship of online news and social media and the imprisonment of social media users for legitimate online expression.

The siege of critical voices has also contributed to an increase in self-censorship, Amnesty International said. More than 20 human rights defenders and political activists told Amnesty International that they had stopped expressing their political opinions on social media platforms, fearing reprisals from the authorities and prison sentences of up to five years in prison. Hundreds of activists and members of the opposition have fled the country to avoid arrest, travel bans or prosecution because of their peaceful human rights work or opposition [activities](#).

Amnesty International urges the Egyptian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all journalists, human rights activists, political figures and others imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Amnesty International conducted 64 interviews between April and June 2018 with former prisoners of conscience, political activists, human rights defenders, relatives and lawyers of current detainees and has reviewed complaints submitted by lawyers of several people who have been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

MEDIA UNDER SIEGE

The crackdown on the media over the last 10 months has been more repressive than at any time since July 2013, when former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi was toppled. Between July 2013 and November 2017, the authorities imprisoned 11 journalists. Since December 2017, they have detained at least 28.

Most of these journalists work for online media outlets, have worked with media outlets based abroad or have interviewed opposition leaders. The crackdown has ensnared critical and independent journalists as well as those who do not cover politics or others who work for pro-government TV stations.

During 2017 the authorities primarily brought defamation charges against imprisoned journalists, but in 2018 they increasingly charged journalists with terrorism-related charges, membership in banned groups as well as spreading false information. The authorities treat information related to human rights abuses or criticism of the performance of state institution as “false information” that requires punishing the publisher with prison sentences or prolonged pre-trial detention. The Office of the Public Prosecutor and the Supreme Council of Media have also imposed several gag orders on cases related to public affairs, such as [corruption](#), impinging on the right to access information.

On 3 April 2018, security forces burst into the office of the independent news website Misr Al Arabia, closed the office and arrested the website's editor in chief, **Adel Sabry**. The Ministry of Interior issued a [statement](#) about the arrest, saying that the office was operating without permission from the competent authorities. When office staff presented papers affirming the site's legal status, the public prosecutor ordered Sabry to be detained on charges of "publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security".

The National Security Agency of the Ministry of Interior has also targeted media workers who have contributed to the production of documentaries about the human rights situation in Egypt. On 18 February, film-editor **Ahmed Tariq** was arrested on charges of belonging to "a banned group" and publishing "false information". Lawyers told Amnesty International that prosecutors justified his detention on the grounds that he edited an independent [documentary](#) on the achievements and failures of President Abdelfattah al-Sisi. On 28 February, prosecutors issued another warrant for the arrest of the producer of the documentary.

On 16 February, security forces arrested journalist [Motaz Wadnan](#) for his interview with Egypt's former top anti-corruption official, Hisham Genina, in which Genina criticized official interference in the presidential elections and other abuses. Wadnan's lawyer told Amnesty International that he had been subjected to beatings and electric shocks in the headquarters of the National Security Agency.

Independent journalists such **Ismail el-Iskandrani** have faced particularly heavy punishment. He was targeted for his [work](#) covering confrontations between armed groups and security forces in the Sinai Peninsula. On 22 May, a military court in Cairo [sentenced](#) el-Iskandrani to 10 years in prison on charges of obtaining and publishing military secrets, publishing false information and membership in a "banned group". His conviction followed two years of pretrial detention. His lawyers told Amnesty International that prosecutors questioned el-Iskandrani about his articles and asked him about his political opinions and how he chooses what topics to cover, but did not produce any evidence that would constitute a recognizable criminal offence in line with international law and standards. El-Iskandrani had been arrested upon his arrival at Cairo airport from Berlin where he had given a number of public talks.

On 4 February, officers of the National Security Agency arrested **independent** journalists **Mustafa al-Aassar** and **Hassan al-Banna Mubarak**, at a checkpoint in Cairo, holding them without charges for over two weeks before bringing them to the Office of the State Security Prosecution. They were denied their right to have contact with the outside world and access to their families and lawyers. Prosecutors accused al-Aassar of working with an independent television station based abroad to produce a documentary on Egypt's "democratic transition". The two journalists remain in detention, though the documentary has not been produced.

On 28 February, security forces [arrested](#) **Mona Mahmoud Mohamed** after she appeared in a BBC documentary about torture in Egypt to discuss the enforced disappearance of her daughter. Prosecutors subsequently ordered her detention on charges of "publishing false information" and joining a "banned group", and issued a statement calling for legal action against any media platform that publishes false information in an apparent reference to the BBC. The official State Information Service likewise [criticized](#) the report and called on Egyptian officials to boycott the BBC.

The National Security Agency has also targeted journalists who typically support the government. On 4 March, prosecutors ordered the [detention](#) of TV presenter **Khairi Ramadan** for four days on charges of insulting the Ministry of Interior on his show, "Egypt Today", which runs on the state television channel. The charges stemmed from Ramadan's hosting of the widow of a police officer who said families of police officers killed on duty face financial difficulties. On 5 March, a prosecutor in Cairo ordered his release on bail.

Journalists who report on non-political issues have also been arrested. On 28 February, security forces in Alexandria arrested journalist **Mai el-Sabagh**, of the news website Rassef22, and photojournalist **Ahmed Mostafa** while they were working on a report covering the tramway in Alexandria. The prosecutor ordered their detention for 15 days on charges of joining a "banned group" that uses terrorism to achieve its goals, "possessing audio-video tools and materials with the intent to use them to publish false information for the purpose of harming national security", "receiving money from foreign entities to achieve the aforementioned goal", "working as a journalist without permission and videotaping without permission from the Ministry of Culture". Prosecutors released both journalists after two weeks in detention.

Officials have also publicly expressed hostile attitudes toward journalists and have claimed that there are no prisoners of conscience in Egypt, arguing that the government does not target people for their political affiliations or opinions. On 22

April, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a [statement](#) urging UNESCO not to award photojournalist **Mahmoud Abu Zeid** (also known as Shawkan)— who had been held in pre-trial detention since he was arrested covering the August 2013 dispersal of a sit-in protest at Cairo’s Rab’a Square— with the 2018 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize. The Ministry said that Shawkan should not be awarded this prize because he was accused of involvement in violence and was not a prisoner of conscience. On 8 September 2018, a criminal court in Cairo sentenced Shawkan to five years in prison and five years on probation.

HUNTING POLITICAL ACTIVISTS AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA USERS ONLINE

Over the past 10 months, the National Security Agency has arrested dozens of political activists for criticizing the authorities online but also regular social media users who have posted satirical content on the internet.

In some cases, security forces have arrested bloggers apparently not for any recent criticism, but for their history of criticizing the authorities. For example, on 23 May 2018 security forces arrested **Wael Abbas**, who in 2004 founded the blog Al-Waai Almasry, which exposed many cases of torture and other ill-treatment by the police. Heavily armed police raided his home, confiscated his laptops, smartphones and books, blindfolded him and arrested him. The following day, Abbas appeared before the Office of the State Security Prosecution where, according to his lawyer, he was interrogated and ordered to remain in detention on suspicion of joining a terrorist group, using the internet to promote the thoughts and ideas of a terrorist group and publishing false information with the purpose of harming national security. Abbas remains in pre-trial detention at Tora Prison Complex.

Approximately 20 security officers in plainclothes arrested comedian and video blogger **Shady Abu Zeid** from his home on 6 May 2018, confiscating two laptop computers, two smartphones, as well as 15,000 EGP (840 USD) and 2,000 USD in cash in the process. Abu Zeid’s sister told Amnesty International that police did not hand over most of the confiscated cash to prosecutors. Abu Zeid had come to prominence as a correspondent for the canceled satirical television show *Abla Fahita* and had continued satirically discussing social and political topics in video segments he posted to social media. Prosecutors subsequently charged him with “membership of a banned group” and “publishing false information”. Abu Zeid runs a satirical Facebook page called “Rich Content” in which he publishes videos discussing social and political topics in a satirical manner. He remains in pre-trial detention.

Mohamed Ibrahim, founder of the well-known blog “Oxygen Egypt”, was also arrested by security forces, on 8 April 2018. Ibrahim used his blog to interview individuals from different political backgrounds to discuss social affairs. His pre-trial detention has been repeatedly renewed on charges of “publishing false information”.

On 15 May, prosecutors summoned activist **Shady el-Ghazali Harb** to interrogate him on charges of “publishing false information” on his Facebook page and of “belonging to a banned group”. Prosecutors have been renewing his pre-trial detention since then. Harb is a doctor and academic in Kasr el-Ainy Faculty of Medicine affiliated to Cairo University. He has been an active member of the opposition since the Mubarak era. Lawyers told Amnesty International that they believe the authorities detained him because of the critical opinions he published on Facebook.

On 6 July, police arrested **Mohamed Adel**, a political activist and prominent member in the April 6 Youth Movement, after a resident in the Nile Delta governorate of Mansoura filed a complaint accusing him of publishing content on his Twitter and Facebook accounts in an effort to harm national security. Adel’s lawyer told Amnesty International that the complainant provided 14 screenshots of his social media posts in which he peacefully expressed his opinion on political matters. Prosecutors interrogated Adel about the facts of this complaint and ordered his detention. He has since been in jailed pending investigation into these charges.

On 9 May, after she was sexually harassed in Cairo, political activist **Amal Fathy** posted a video on her Facebook page, in which she spoke about the prevalence of sexual harassment in Egypt and criticized the government’s failure to protect women. She also criticized the government for human rights abuses and what she called deteriorating economic conditions and public services. On 11 May, security forces broke into her apartment and arrested her along with her husband, Mohamed Lotfy, who was released on the same day. Lotfy is a former Amnesty International researcher and the current director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms. Prosecutors ordered Fathy’s detention in two cases (7991 and 621 of 2018) on charges of “publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security” and “joining a terrorist group”, respectively. On 21 June, a criminal court in Cairo ordered her release in case number 7991 of 2018, but prosecutors renewed her pre-trial detention in the second case.

MASS BLOCKING OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Since May 2017, the Egyptian authorities have blocked access to at least 504 websites. This is a relatively new practice in Egypt, as the blocking of websites was not common under former President Mubarak. Many of the censored sites had served as a last redoubt for critical voices who have no longer found space on television or the print media, both of which have been firmly in the grip of the state since al-Sisi came to power.

According to a [report](#) published jointly by the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) and the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI), 62% of the blocked websites provide news services, 6% belong to human rights groups, 5% belong to political groups, and 24% provide tools for circumventing online censorship and surveillance. The blocking of websites has taken place without judicial order or oversight. In May 2017, the daily newspaper *al-Masry al Youm* cited “a security agency” as saying that access to the websites was blocked because they were “publishing false information” or “harming national security”.

NEW MEDIA AND CYBER-CRIME LAWS FURTHER CRIMINALIZE EXPRESSION ONLINE

On 27 August 2018, the president signed into force a law granting executive and security agencies broad and vaguely defined powers over different forms of journalism. Law No. 180 of 2018, known as the Law of the Organization of Press, Media and the Supreme Council of Media gives the state near-total control over print, online and broadcast media.

Parliamentarians who sponsored the bill say the law was needed to “update regulation of the media for the digital era” and the Egyptian Foreign Ministry called the law “a [victory](#) for freedom of expression”. However, many of the articles further strangle free expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.

The law governs the establishment of private media platforms and the behavior of private and public media, and regulates newspapers, news websites, TV channels and radio stations owned and run by the state.

Article 19 of the Law of the Organization of Press, Media and the Supreme Council of Media increases the Egyptian government’s already overly broad powers to monitor, censor and block social media websites and blogs, and criminalizes any content that violates vaguely defined political, social or religious norms. Article 95 gives the Supreme Council of Media the authority to file criminal complaints against digital media platforms and individuals on the basis of vaguely worded offences such as “inciting people to violate laws” and “defamation against the individuals and state institutions”. Article 54 creates unreasonable bureaucratic and financial barriers to founding and operating news websites. Establishing an online video channel on a website, for example, requires having a company with at least EGP 2.5 million (USD 139,880) in capital.

The law subjects any individual social media accounts with more than 5000 followers as media platforms to the same level of criminal responsibility as formalized media outlets with regard to acts such as “publishing false information” or “inciting the public to disobey laws.”

On 14 August 2018, the president also approved a new cyber-crime law referred to him by the parliament. The law gives police and investigative authorities the power to monitor and block websites for material they deem as inciting crime or harming national security.

These provisions are not consistent with Egypt’s obligations under international human rights law and in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights.

“Spreading false information” cannot be a crime since it is not a legitimate restriction on freedom of expression, as was recently reiterated in a 2017 joint [communication](#) by UN and Regional Special Rapporteurs on Fake News, Disinformation and Propaganda. In its General Comment 34, the Human Rights Committee stated that “the Covenant does not permit general prohibition of expression of an erroneous opinion or an incorrect interpretation of past events.” A 2010 African Commission on Human and People’s Rights resolution 169 called on state parties to “repeal criminal defamation laws or insult laws which impede freedom of speech, and to adhere to the provisions of freedom of expression, articulated in the African Charter,” finding that “criminal defamation laws constitute a serious interference with freedom of expression and impedes on the role of the media as a watchdog, preventing journalists and media practitioners from practicing their profession without fear and in good faith.” A 2002 joint declaration by the UN, OSCR and OAS Special Rapporteurs on

Freedom of Expression said that “criminal defamation is not a justifiable restriction on freedom of expression; all criminal defamation laws should be abolished and replaced, where necessary, with appropriate civil defamation laws.”

ARRESTS FOR PROTESTING AGAINST RISING PRICES

The Egyptian police have even responded harshly to people peacefully [protesting](#) against government austerity measures. On 11 May 2018, the Ministry of Transportation increased the price of [metro tickets](#) by 250%, significantly adding to the rising cost of living after the Egyptian Pound was devaluated in late 2016. On 12 May, security forces arrested at least 35 individuals on charges of “participating in unauthorized protests” and “membership in a terrorist group”. They released 22 detainees the same day pending investigation. However, at least 13 other protesters remain in pre-trial detention.

Labour and human rights lawyer Haytham Mohamdeen was also arrested in the context of these protests despite the fact that he did not participate in the protest and had been with his family at the time. On 18 May, security forces arrested him from his house in [Giza governorate](#) and held him incommunicado for two days. The Office of the State Security Prosecution then charged him with “unauthorized protests” and “membership in a terrorist group”. Prosecutors have routinely renewed his pre-trial detention since. Mohamdeen has defended hundreds of workers prosecuted for forming independent trade unions and calling for better working conditions. Security and judicial officials have repeatedly harassed him for his human rights work in the past and on this occasion his arrest appears to be related to his past work on economic and social rights work.

ELIMINATING POLITICAL OPPOSITION

Ahead of the presidential elections of March 2018, security services arrested a number of senior political figures for their criticism of the president, the elections and the political environment. On 24 January 2018, security forces arrested **Sami Anan**, the military’s former chief of staff, four days after he announced in a video posted on Facebook his intention to run against President al-Sisi. On 23 January, the Armed Forces announced on its official Facebook page that Sami Anan would be interrogated and face legal action for announcing his nomination in the presidential elections “without obtaining the permission of the Armed Forces”. Anan, who might have provided some genuine electoral competition to President al-Sisi, remains in detention in a military prison.

On 13 February, security officials arrested **Hisham Genina**, a senior member in Sami Anan’s presidential campaign and formerly Egypt’s most senior anticorruption official. On 12 April, he was referred to a military court for trial on charges of “publishing false information with the aim of harming national security” for comments he made to HuffPost Arabi alleging irregularities in the electoral process. On 24 May, a military court sentenced him to [five years in prison](#).

On 14 February, **Abdelmonim Aboufotoh**, the founder of the Misr al-Qawia political party and a presidential candidate in the 2012 election, was arrested following critical remarks he made regarding human rights abuses in interviews with the satellite TV stations [Al Jazeera](#) and Al Araby TV. His lawyer told Amnesty International that Aboufotoh has been held in solitary confinement since his arrest and has not had access to the medical care he requires. He has suffered four [heart attacks](#) since his detention and prison authorities have refused to send him to a hospital outside prison. Aboufotoh is detained on the charges of membership in a terrorist group” and “publishing false information.”

Aboufotoh’s deputy in the Misr al-Qawia party, **Mohamed al-Kassas**, had been arrested weeks earlier on the same charges and has also been held in solitary confinement since his arrest. He has remained locked in his cell 24 hours a day, only allowed to go out for a few family visits, each of no longer than 10 minutes.

Security forces arrested political activists **Gamal Abdelfattah**, 72 years old, and 62-year-old **Hassan Hussein** from their homes on 28 February and 2 March, respectively. They subsequently appeared before the Office of the State Security Prosecution which ordered their detention pending investigation on charges of “membership in a terrorist group,” despite the fact that they are not members in any political groups. Their arrest appeared to be related to their Facebook posts that called on the Egyptians to boycott the presidential elections. On 4 September, a criminal court in Cairo ordered their conditional release on probation. They were released on 9 September.

Lawyer and human rights defender **Ezzat Ghonim**, who provided counsel to a mother whose daughter was allegedly subjected to enforced disappearance, was himself forcibly disappeared on 1 March 2018. He then appeared on 3 March at the Office of the State Security Prosecution, which detained him on charges of “publishing false information.” On 15 March 2018, National Security Agency officers took Ghonim from his cell in Tora Prison Complex, south of Cairo, and

forced him to videotape a “confession” saying that he belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood. A criminal Court in Cairo ordered his release on probation on 4 September.

On 23 August 2018, police forces arrested former ambassador, **Masom Marzok** from his home in Cairo after he launched an invitation on his personal Facebook page calling for a referendum on whether president al-Sisi should continue in office. On the same day, security forces arrested the economic researcher **Raed Salama** and **Yahia el-Kazzaz**, an academic at Helwan university, apparently in relation to meetings they held in Marzok’s house in which they discussed the political situation in Egypt. The security forces also detained other individuals at the same point, including **Nermin Hussein, Amr Mohamed, Abdelfattah Said** and **Sameh Saudi**. Security forces arrested Sameh Saudi’s wife and his two children, five and seven years old from their home in Cairo when they did not find him. They arrested Saudi later that day and released his family. The group’s arrest came after Marzok invited political activists to gather in Tahrir Square on 31 August to discuss the political situation in Egypt.

On 24 August, the Office of the State Security Prosecutor ordered the group’s detention for 15 days on charges of “supporting a terrorist group to achieve its goal” and “receiving fund for terrorist purposes” in the case No.1305 of 2018.

FOOTBALL FANS TARGETED INSIDE AND OUTSIDE STADIUMS

Groups comprised of fans of sporting clubs - commonly known as “Ultras” – especially the Ultras Ahlawy and the Ultras White Knights which support the Al-Ahly and Zamalek sporting clubs respectively, have had a long and often rocky relationship with police. In February 2011, 74 Ultras Ahlawy were killed in a confrontation with police and an ensuing stampede during a match in the northeastern city of Port Said. In February 2015, police killed 20 members of the Ultras White Knights in Cairo before a football match by dispersing a gathering before entering the stadium. These deaths further galvanized the groups in their opposition to the Ministry of Interior, inspiring songs memorializing their fallen comrades and other anti-police chants.

Over the course of February 2018, security forces arrested at least 44 members of the Ultras White Knights group. The detentions started on 8 February when police arrested 13 members of the group who organized a trip on the Nile River to commemorate the third anniversary of the death of 20 members of their group at the hands of the police. Over the course of the following days, police arrested an additional 31 members, some from their homes, and referred them to the State Security Prosecution, which ordered their detention pending trial on charges of “joining a terrorist group”.

On 6 March 2018, Ultras Ahlawy were confronted by riot police following a match between their club and the Gabonese Mounana club. Between 6 and 31 March 2018, security forces detained at least 44 members of the Ultras Ahlawy. The public prosecutor issued a statement alleging those detained had attacked the police after the match. Prosecutors ordered their detention pending trial on charges of “being leaders of a terrorist group”, “joining a terrorist group” and “damaging public and private property”.

ABUSING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM TO TARGET AND HARASS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND JOURNALISTS

Security forces and prosecutors have abused the criminal justice system to target and harass human rights defenders, members of the opposition and journalists, by keeping them in jail awaiting trial, sometimes for years. In some cases, prosecutors have ordered these individuals to be detained on new charges immediately after a judge ordered their release in another case. Prosecutors have repeatedly grouped detainees together in the same case, though they do not know each other and were arrested separately for different reasons.

For example, in Case Number 977 of 2017, prosecutors lumped together the cases of journalists accused of “publishing false information”, arrested in December 2017 because they had worked with satellite television channels that have often been critical of the Egyptian government and security agencies, with the cases of at least two individuals arrested in the same month in Egypt for protesting US President Donald Trump’s decision to move the US Embassy to Israel to Jerusalem. This illustrates that prosecutors ordered the detention of these activists despite the absence of any individual criminal responsibility that would justify their detention and that the charges against them are fabricated.

Prosecutors in February 2018 accused journalists [Hassan el-Banna and Mostafa el-Aasar](#) of publishing false information and joining a terrorist group in Case Number 441 of 2018, which related to the alleged work of al-Aasar with a documentary filmmaker. In April 2018, they added Amal Fathy to the case after she published a video on Facebook

speaking about her experience with sexual harassment, though they did not say why or whether they suspected Fathy had any connection to the journalists or the documentary.

The use of prolonged pre-trial detention against human rights activists, journalists and members of the opposition is one of the main tactics the al-Sisi government has used to harass critical voices. During the Mubarak era the authorities also used pre-trial detention as a method of punishing critics, but the period of detention was often limited to a few months. Journalists Hassan el-Banna, Moustafa el-Aasar and Moataz Wadnan have been accused of joining "terrorist groups" since February 2018.

In recent months alone, at least two political activists and one journalist have been immediately detained again, as soon as courts had ordered their release on bail or probation by orders of prosecutors.

On 9 July, a criminal court in Cairo ordered the release of journalist Adel Sabry on bail of EGP 10,000 (USD 560) pending "investigation on charges of publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security" in case number 4681 of 2018. However, National Security Agency officers brought Sabry straight to the State Security Prosecution on new charges of "membership in a banned group" and "publishing false information", and ordered his detention pending investigation in a separate case – number 441 of 2018.

On 14 May, prosecutors ordered the release of Shady el-Ghazaly Harb (whose case is detailed above) on bail of EGP 50,000 (USD 2,800), which his lawyers and family members subsequently paid. Nonetheless, National Security Agency officers refused to release him, and instead referred him to the Office of the State Security Prosecution on charges of "belonging to a banned group".

Amnesty International calls for the release of the following illustrative list of cases mentioned above of people imprisoned solely for their peaceful exercise of expression, assembly and association:

1. **Amal Fathy**, human rights defender, Case No. 7991 and 621 of 2018, arrested in May 2018 from her home after she shared a video on her Facebook account in which she criticized sexual harassment in Egypt and the inaction of the authorities. She is currently facing trial in the first case on charges of publishing false information and possessing indecent material and is in pre-trial detention in the other pending further investigation.
2. **Haytham Mohamdeen**, labour and human rights lawyer, Case No. 718 of 2018, arrested from his home in May 2018, charged with "joining a terrorist group, inciting unauthorized protests and disrupting public facilities" because of his suspected involvement in a protest against the rising price of metro tickets.
3. **Ezzat Ghonim**, human rights lawyer and head of the NGO the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms., Case No. 441 of 2018, arrested in March 2018 for his work supporting families of victims of enforced disappearance. Prosecutors ordered his detention on charges of "membership in a terrorist group" and "publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security". On 4 September, a criminal court ordered his release on probation. However, the court's decision has not been implemented.
4. **Shady el-Ghazali**, a doctor and political activist, Cases No. 1697 and 621 of 2018, arrested in May 2018 and charged with "membership in a banned group" and "spreading false information" for his critical writings on his Facebook page.
5. **Wael Abbas**, high-profile blogger, Case No. 441 of 2018. Arrested from his home in May 2018 and detained in relation to charges of "joining a banned group" and "publishing false information". There is no indication that anything specific prompted his arrest. Abbas is a long-term and vocal critic of the authorities.
6. **Ahmed Tarek**, video editor, Case No. 467 of 2018. Arrested at his home by National Security Agents in February 2018, because of his work editing a documentary on the achievements and failures of President Abdelfattah al-Sisi. Currently detained while being investigated on charges of "membership in a banned group and "publishing false information."
7. **Mustafa al-Aasar**, journalist, Case No. 441 of 2018. Arrested in February 2018 from the street along with his

colleague Hassan el-Banna because of his work with a documentary producer to produce a documentary on Egypt's "democratic transition". Prosecutors ordered his detention on charges of "joining a banned group" and "publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security".

8. **Hassan el-Banna** journalist, Case No. 441 of 2018; arrested in February 2018 from the street along with his colleague Moustafa al-Aasar. Prosecutors ordered his detention on charges of "joining a banned group" and "publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security" solely because he was with Mostafa al-Aasar at the time he was arrested.
9. **Motaz Wadnan**, journalist, Case No. 441 of 2018. On 16 February, security forces arrested him because of an interview he had conducted with former senior anti-graft official Hisham Genina in which the latter criticized the authorities' interference in the presidential elections. Prosecutors ordered Wadnan's detention on charges of "membership in a terrorist group" and "publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security".
10. **Adel Sabry**, editor in chief of Misr Al-Arabia news website, Cases No. 4681 and 441 of 2018. Security forces raided and shut down the office of Misr Al Arabia news website in April 2018 and arrested its editor in chief, Adel Sabry in relation to the website's critical coverage of the human rights and political situation in Egypt. Prosecutor ordered his detention on charges of "membership in a terrorist group" and "publishing false information for the purpose of harming national security".
11. **Mohamed Adel**, political activist, Case No. 5606 of 2018. In June 2018, police arrested him from a police station where he had been spending his probation time as part of a sentence he received in 2013 from a court on charges of participating in an unauthorized protest. The latest arrest came in relation to accusations that he had been publishing content on his Twitter and Facebook accounts to harm national security.
12. **Hisham Genina**, former top state auditor. Arrested February 2018, after a media interview he gave to HuffPost Arabi in which he criticized the interference of the Egyptian authorities in the then upcoming presidential election. He was charged with "publishing false information for harming national security" by the Office of Military Prosecution which ordered his detention and referred to military trial in April. On 24 May 2018 a military court sentenced him to five years in prison after an unfair trial.
13. **Masom Marzok**, former Egyptian ambassador and political activist, Case No. 1305 of 2018. On 23 August 2018, police forces arrested him from his home in Cairo after he launched an event invitation on his personal Facebook page calling for a referendum on whether president al-Sisi should continue in office.
14. **Raed Salama**, researcher in economics, Case No. 1305 of 2018. On 23 August 2018, police forces arrested him from his home in Cairo in the same case as Masom Marzok. His detention apparently came in relation to his participation in meetings held at Masom Marzok's house to discuss political developments in Egypt. Prosecutors ordered their detention on charges of "supporting a terrorist group to achieve its goals" and "receiving fund for achieving terrorist purposes".
15. **Shady Abu Zied**, satirical blogger, Case No. 621 of 2018. On 6 May, security forces arrested Shady Abu Zied from his home. Prosecutors ordered his pre-trial detention pending investigation on charges of "membership in a banned group" and "disseminating false news". His detention has been related to a satirical Facebook page he runs called "Rich Content" in which he publishes videos discussing social and political topics in a satirical manner. He remains in pre-trial detention.

