



9 June 2015

## **Urgent Action: Egyptian Government Begins Formal Investigation Against CIHRS**

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) would like to bring to your attention an alarming new development in the rapidly increasing legal persecution and harassment campaign by the government and investigating bodies in Egypt against independent civil society, particularly human rights organizations and groups.

**Today, 9 June 2015, the Investigating Judge in case number 173/2011 (known as the foreign funding case against NGOs) mandated a “Committee of Experts” to inspect the Egypt office of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS).**

The committee asked the staff present in the office to provide documentation relating to the administration of the NGO, such as its registration, founding contract and statute, as well as the budgets, financial accounts, and funding contracts for the past four years. Crucially, the staff members were instructed to provide documentation that proves that CIHRS is not doing NGO work.

*This last request indicates that the government is taking serious steps to implement their announced plan to shut down all associations that are not complying with the 84/2002 NGO law.*

The Committee of Experts, comprised of employees of the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS)<sup>1</sup>, was founded by the investigating Judge in April 2015 to look into the files of the Egyptian Democratic Academy (EDA) and determine whether the organization complies with its mandate as a civic association (as per the stipulations of the NGO Law 84/2002) and examine its funding sources. It is important to note that the committee has no working relation with the MoSS as it reports directly to the investigation judge.

CIHRS appears to be second on the list of this investigation committee, following the EDA, which is currently subject to investigations pertaining to the foreign funding case, with travel bans imposed on 4 of its staff and founders. It is significant that the EDA is being investigated even though it has registered in compliance with the November 10<sup>th</sup> ultimatum.

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<sup>1</sup> The committee is composed of MoSS officials but they report to the investigating judge, not the Minister of Social Solidarity. Their report will be part of any lawsuit brought against NGOs by the government. Also the Judge can select any committee of experts from a different background

CIHRS' Director spoke at the European Parliament Human Rights Subcommittee session about the general human rights situation in Egypt on May 28. We believe that the escalation of this case amounts to an act of reprisal for his participation.

**CIHRS strongly believes that the core objective of the government is to put an end to the work and existence of the entire independent human rights community in Egypt, through pursuing legal measures based on extremely repressive laws, and which will result not only in the closure of the targeted organizations and groups, but also in prison sentences of up to life against their founders and staff.**

On May 4, 20 civil society organizations [warned](#) that the legal action taken against the EDA (an organization registered under Associations law 84/2002 since September 2014) will extend to other active human rights organizations, both registered and unregistered as such.

In this context, it is important to note that the EDA and CIHRS are not the only organizations targeted by the ongoing investigations. CIHRS staff learnt from the Committee that *at least two other NGOs (the Hisham Mubarak Law Center and the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights) are also currently being investigated.*

**CIHRS strongly believes that failure to react promptly and strongly to put an end to these investigations and to the ongoing case against NGOs, will not only lead to prosecution and closure of EDA and CIHRS, but will give the Egyptian government a green light to pursue a long list of independent civil society organizations in Egypt.**

Last week, a leading independent Egyptian newspapers has [warned](#) that the Egyptian government is preparing an alleged espionage case against a number of leading human rights activists.

CIHRS also believes that the targeting of its offices is partially a direct result of its active and ongoing work in vigorously fighting against the restrictions to public space, particularly those pertaining to the work and functioning of independent civil society in Egypt.

We express extreme concern regarding the implications of the current escalation against CIHRS which will result in further restrictions not only to the work of CIHRS, but to the rest of the independent human rights organizations in Egypt to whom CIHRS offers a venue for constant support and advocacy.