

Statement at 33rd session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 8: Follow up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

Thank you, Mr President.

ISHR makes this statement on behalf of 8¹ human rights organisations to condemn the increased attacks aimed at deterring NGOs from exposing human rights violations.

The failure of States to protect in these instances is incompatible with the VDPA's recognition of the 'important role of non-governmental organisations in the promotion of all human rights', that NGOs should be able to play this role 'without interference', and that they 'enjoy the rights and freedoms recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'.

One example of such interference is the ruling on 17 September by a Cairo Criminal Court to freeze the personal bank accounts of five Egyptian human rights defenders - Bahey el din Hassan, Hossam Bahgat, Gamal Eid, Mostafa El-Hassan, and Abdel Hafiz Tayel – as part of the ongoing investigations into case no.173, also known as the foreign funding case.

The court also froze the bank accounts of three human rights NGOs: the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Hisham Mubarak Law Center, and Center for the Right to Education. As a result, a judicial committee is now expected to manage the funds of these independent NGOs and defenders.

The VDPA makes clear that the 'administration of justice, ... especially, an independent judiciary and legal profession in full conformity with applicable standards contained in international human rights instruments, are essential to the full and non-discriminatory realization of human rights'.

To illustrate: In Egypt, the judiciary has been used as a tool in the ongoing crackdown on civil society, systematically failing to respect fair procedures. None of the individuals or organizations accused have thus far been permitted to view their entire case file, nor to present their defense before the investigative judges. Further, the court relied for its verdict on allegedly falsified investigations compiled by Egypt's National Security Agency (NSA), and disregarded all material evidence presented by the defendants.

Such systematic attacks on civil society are not only illegal, but ill-advised and absolutely inimical to a State's national interests, peace and prosperity.

¹ Amnesty International, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Centros de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS), Conectas Direitos Humanos, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Programme (EHAHRDP), Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

We call on Egyptian authorities to immediately and unconditionally reverse the ruling and drop the investigation into case no. 173. We also stress that Egyptian human rights defenders need the support of this Council, particularly those States that have repeatedly expressed their commitment to protecting HRDs. We urge States to demonstrate their genuine leadership in this regard.

Thank you.