

To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations (UN)
Human Rights Council

24 February 2023

Joint NGO Letter: The Need for Follow-up Action on Egypt at the 52nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Excellencies,

The upcoming session marks two years since a group of 32 states delivered a [joint statement](#) on Egypt at the UN Human Rights Council (the Council), addressing the human rights crisis in the country. Since that time, no consequential follow-up has occurred at the Council, despite the fact the human rights situation in Egypt has further deteriorated. UN experts have expressed concern over the heightened risk of reprisals to dissidents and human rights defenders as the world's spotlight shifts away from the country after COP27. This session of the Council provides states with an opportunity to maintain that spotlight in order to prevent further abuses. **In this context, we urge you to work with other states, to build on momentum created during COP27, and ensure the human rights situation in Egypt is addressed during the Council's 52nd session. The situation clearly warrants a resolution, but at the very least states should deliver a follow-up joint statement.**

As witnessed by the world during COP27, the brutal crackdown on civil society in Egypt continues to intensify, and sustained, coordinated action on Egypt at the Council is more necessary than ever. A joint statement by UN member states on the human rights situation in Egypt has been delivered at the Council twice before, in 2014 and 2021. The prolonged gap between these two statements witnessed an alarming deterioration in the human rights situation in Egypt, likely due, in part, to a belief by the Egyptian government that it was immune from criticism. If the Egyptian government is to begin to seriously address long-standing human rights concerns the same mistake should not be repeated by the international community. Joint action by UN member states at the Council is urgently required to send a clear message to the Egyptian authorities that wide-spread rights violations in the country, and impunity for these violations, are unacceptable.

The joint statement delivered by member states at the Council in March 2021 had direct impact, playing a critical role in securing the release of several Egyptians detained arbitrarily for peacefully exercising their human rights. The Egyptian government also took a number of measures to improve its image, including issuing its first national human rights strategy in September 2021 and announcing a national dialogue in 2022.

Unfortunately, however, more action is required. The steps taken by the Egyptian government thus far have been designed to cover-up the grim reality of the escalating crackdown. They do not reflect a genuine political will to halt the government's systematic attack on human rights, nor to end its long-standing campaign to "annihilate" the country's independent human rights movement. As highlighted in a petition signed ahead of COP27 by more than 1400 organizations and individuals from 82 countries, these violations deeply undermine efforts to address larger social injustices including "[ecological destruction, abuses by businesses, corruption and impunity, and social and economic inequality.](#)"

The Egyptian government has failed to implement almost all of the promises and commitments it has made concerning human rights reform within the country, including those made in the context of the recently concluded COP27. Throughout 2022, the UN Special Procedures repeatedly and urgently warned the international community of the worsening human rights situation in the country.

In this context, the concerns expressed in the March 2021 joint statement before the Council have been largely ignored, the road to meaningful improvement in the human rights situation in Egypt remains blocked, and the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly continue to be severely repressed. The authorities continue to misuse counterterrorism laws to detain tens of thousands, including hundreds of human rights defenders, activists, political opponents and journalists, while systematically resorting to enforced disappearances and torture. Between the reactivation of the Presidential Pardons Committee in April 2022 and the end of 2022, the authorities released around 900 people held for political reasons, but almost triple that number of suspected critics and opponents were interrogated by prosecutors and arbitrarily detained.¹

The well-known [case of British-Egyptian democracy activist and blogger Alaa Abdelfattah is emblematic of this abusive pattern.](#) Mr. Abdelfattah is currently serving a five-year sentence for allegedly "spreading false news." He has also been charged with terrorism related offences and did not receive a fair trial. United Nations experts have sent six communications regarding Mr. Abdelfattah's case to the Egyptian government where they [set out profound concerns regarding his multiple arrests, detention, sentencing in absentia, ill-treatment while held in Tora prison, and prolonged pre-trial detention.](#)

The Egyptian authorities have also failed to adequately address entrenched gender-based violence and discrimination, and instead have continued to prosecute and otherwise harass women human rights defenders speaking out and seeking justice for sexual assaults. The 2019 NGO law remains an impediment to independent work and several human rights defenders remain behind bars or under indefinite travel bans and asset freezes. Authorities continue to harass, intimidate, raid the homes of, and arrest, families of dissidents abroad to force those in exile and the wider diaspora into silence. No steps have been taken to repeal or substantially amend repressive laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of human rights and/or erode fair trial guarantees including the counterterrorism, cybercrimes or the anti-protest laws. This legislation is regularly used to censor media, arbitrarily arrest journalists, and obstruct press freedom. Egypt is now one of the biggest jailers of journalists worldwide.

To have real impact on the situation on the ground, Human Rights Council action must be sustained and strategic. We appeal to all UN member states committed to combatting gender discrimination, torture, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, the protection of human rights defenders, civil society space, and the safety of journalists, to send a clear message to the Egyptian authorities through follow up action at the upcoming session of the Council. As was evidenced by the Egyptian government's abusive tactics during COP27, a follow-up resolution, or at minimum a joint statement, by UN member states at the upcoming session is essential to meaningfully address the on-going human rights crisis in Egypt, and to send a clear message to the Government that the international community will continue to watch and respond to the situation as it develops.

Representatives from our organisations would welcome an opportunity to discuss this matter with you in more detail and hope we can count on your commitment to the protection of human rights in Egypt.

Signatories:

Amnesty International

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

DIGNITY - Danish Institute against Torture

EuroMed Rights

Human Rights Watch

International Service for Human Rights

Reporters sans frontières

1. The Egyptian Front for Human Rights has documented that between end of April 2022 to 6 January 2023, 2559 individuals were detained for the first time in the same period.