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Egypt –Threats against the General Nubian Union and its leaders

On 9 January 2017, Egyptian authorities informally summoned board members of the General Nubian Union, demanded that their Union be dissolved and threatened to freeze their Union’s assets. According to Mr **Mohamed Azmy**, the President of the General Nubian Union, Egyptian authorities further threatened him and his colleagues with detention and a forceful closure of the General Nubian Union if they refused to voluntarily dissolve it.

[Mohamed Azmy](#) is a lawyer and human rights defender and is currently President of the **General Nubian Union**, based in Aswan. He advocates for land rights of Nubian people and fair resettlement in their historical homeland in the south of Egypt. The General Nubian Union in Aswan is a recently founded movement which is active in promoting the right to the return of the Nubian community to their ancestral land since their forced displacement as a result of various government-led projects such as the construction of the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s which had a major impact on the community. Following their forced displacement, Nubian people have been unable to resettle due to the government’s continued practice of ignoring their calls for resettlement. The Nubian people are indigenous African people situated mainly in the southern parts of Egypt. In addition to historically facing land expropriation and forced displacement by the Egyptian government, Nubian people also face cultural marginalisation.

Last week, Egyptian authorities demanded that Mohamed Azmy and several other board members of the General Nubian Union step down. The human rights defender and board members of the Union refused to step down and instead held a general assembly asking for members of the Union to vote for a new board. On 13 January, members of the General Nubian Union voted to re-elect the Union’s board members, including Mohamed Azmy as President.

Threats by the Egyptian authorities against the General Nubian Union and its leaders have escalated as a result of peaceful protests led by groups, including the General Nubian Union, who have been calling on the Egyptian government to stop selling Nubian land. This land is being sold as part of government-led projects known as the “one and a half million acre” project in southern Egypt. After Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi announced the project in October 2015, Nubian people in southern Egypt have engaged in protests against the selling of their land as it would prohibit them from resettling there in the future. Despite their protests, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi assigned 922 acres of land in the Nubian area of Toshka for an alleged developmental project in August 2016 disregarding the calls for resettlement of the Nubian community. Two years earlier in 2014, the Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi assigned “military zones” to a significant portion of the Nubian ancestral land which included sixteen Nubian villages.

The Nubian community has continued to protest peacefully for resettlement in their ancestral land. The protests have been met with force and subsequent judicial harassment by Egyptian authorities. On 3 January 2017, six members of the Nubian community who were part of the “Nubian Return Caravan” campaign were arrested by Egyptian security forces as they were travelling on a bus towards western

Aswan in protest against a government's decision to revoke Nubian ownership of 138 acres of land in the area to make way for a government-led tourism project. The six protesters were prohibited from exiting the bus by Egyptian security forces and are currently under investigation by the Aswan Prosecution office for "blocking roads" and "holding banners." On 29 November 2016, Egyptian security forces prohibited the "Nubian Return Caravan" campaign from carrying out a press conference at Egypt's press syndicate that had been pre-approved by the General Secretary of the journalists' syndicate. The purpose of this press conference was to discuss the history of the Nubian people and their civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights. Egyptian forces continue to obstruct peaceful protests by the Nubian community which violates their cultural rights, their right to equality and their right to freedom of expression by calling for fair resettlement in their ancestral land within Egypt.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the threats against the General Nubian Union and its leaders as it believes that they are solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Egypt to:

1. Immediately cease all forms of intimidation and harassment against the General Nubian Union and its leaders, including Mohamed Azmy;
2. Ensure that Nubian people enjoy full and unfettered freedom of association in Egypt;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Egypt are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.