

Egypt: Enforced disappearance of human rights defenders

Human rights defender **Ezzat Ghoneim** disappeared from Al Haram police station 10 days after he was granted conditional release on 4 September 2018. He remained unlawfully detained until 13 September 2018, when police officers informed his wife of his alleged release. The whereabouts of the human rights defender have been unknown ever since. Cases of enforced disappearances of human rights defenders, after courts ruling in their favor, have become a frequent practice in Egypt in recent months.

[Ezzat Ghoneim](#) is a human rights defender and lawyer focusing on the right to fair trial and enforced disappearances. Since 2014, he has served as executive director of the **Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms**, a human rights organisation which works on arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, freedom of expression, medical negligence and torture inside prisons.

On 4 September 2018, Ezzat Ghoneim was granted conditional release. However, Al-Haram police station refused to release him and justified the decision by stating that they were waiting for “instructions from the National Security Agency”. Even though on 13 September 2018, the human rights defender’s wife was told by police officers that her husband was released, he has not been seen ever since. The authorities are denying any link to his disappearance.

Ezzat Ghoneim was detained on 1 March 2018 in relation to case No. 441, 2018, known as the “media activism” case, along with a number of Egyptian journalists whose investigative reporting aimed to expose high level corruption in the Egyptian government. The charges against him also include “membership of an unlawful organization”.

This is only one example of how the State Security Agency systematically bypasses judiciary rulings in Egypt; several human rights defenders who were released by court rulings have been disappeared from the places of their detention. [Haytham Mohamadeen](#), a lawyer, labour rights defender and member of El-Naddim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, was forcibly disappeared between the decision of his conditional release on 10 October and the time he was released on 29 October 2018. During this time, neither his family nor his lawyer were informed of the human rights defenders' whereabouts. It is suspected that he was held at the State Security Agency.

On 14 October 2018, human rights defender and lawyer Sayed El Banna was arrested on charges of belonging to a banned group. No one knew his whereabouts, until he appeared blindfolded before the State Security Prosecution 3 days after his arrest. Sayed el Banna’s pre-trial detention is renewed every 15 days and can be renewed for a period of up to 150 days by the State Security Prosecution.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern over the increasingly difficult situation of human rights defenders in Egypt. Since 2014, increasing restrictions on civil society and peaceful public protests are being imposed and numerous human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and peaceful protesters face travel bans, unlawful arrests and [judicial harassment](#). In this challenging context, the State Security’s practice of disappearing human rights defenders, ignoring judicial decisions in their favour, is particularly worrying.

Front Line Defenders urges the Egyptian authorities to:

1. Disclose the whereabouts of Ezzat Ghoneim.
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Ezzat Ghoneim and Sayed El Banna, as Front Line Defenders believes that they is being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful human rights work;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Ezzat Ghoneim and Sayed El Banna;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in all circumstances, so that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment