

20 November 2020

Egypt: Crackdown on Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights staff

On 20 November 2020, the State Security Prosecutor ordered the preventive detention of human rights defender Gasser Abdel Razek. The detention of Gasser Abdel Razek is part of a wider crackdown against the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). This comes after the arrest of EIPR's director of criminal justice, **Karim Ennarah** on 18 November and the arrest of EIPR's administrative manager **Monhammed Basheer** on 16 November. These arrests came after a visit by 13 foreign ambassadors and diplomats to the EIPR headquarters on 3 November 2020 for a briefing on the human rights situation.

Gasser Abdel Razek is the executive director of the EIPR. His work focuses on promoting economic and social rights in Egypt. Recently, he has been advocating for prisoners rights amidst COVID-19 and against the extensive use of the death penalty in Egypt.

On 19 November 2020, Gasser Abdel Razek was detained by the Egyptian Security forces at his home and taken to unknown location. A few hours later, the human rights defender appeared at the Supreme State Security Prosecution office. At 6:00am on 20 November 2020, the State Security Prosecutor ordered his preventive detention for 15 days, and charged him with 'joining a terrorist group', 'disseminating false statements to undermine public security', and 'using the internet to publish false news'.

On 18 November 2020, National Security officers arrested Karim Ennarah, at the Dahab resort in South Sinai province and took him to an unknown location. After almost 24 hours of enforced disappearance, the human rights defender was located at the State Security Sector Facility, where he was interrogated about his work with the EIPR and the visit of diplomats and ambassadors to the EIPR on 3 November 2020. The State Public Prosecutor charged the human rights defender with "joining a terror group" and "spreading false news", and he too was placed in preventive detention for 15 days.

In the early hours of 16 November 2020, the home of human rights defender Mohammed Basheer was raided by several Egyptian Security officers. During the raid Mohammed Basheer was arrested and detained for more than 12 hours at the State Security Sector Facility, where he was interrogated regarding his work, the publications of the EIPR, and the above-mentioned visit of several diplomats and staff from foreign embassies to the EIPR on 3 November 2020. The State Public Prosecutor charged the human rights defender with 'joining a terrorist organisation with knowledge of its purposes', 'the spread of false news', 'funding terrorism' and 'broadcasting false news and statements that undermines public security and harming national interest', and ordered him to be placed in preventive detention for 15 days. The arrests appear to be a reprisal for the meeting with the EU and US diplomats.

EIPR staff have reported frequent harassment by the Egyptian authorities, and believe their colleagues' arrests were in reprisal for their meeting of foreign diplomats. On 7 February 2020, human rights defender **Patrick George** was detained at Cairo airport and taken into custody by the National Security Agency. The following day, the Public Prosecutor of Mansoura ordered his detention on remand for 15 days. However, Patrick George remains in preventive detention which has been continually renewed every 45 days. Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the detention of the EIPR staff. Front Line Defenders believes that these human rights defenders were solely detained as a result of their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders urge the Egyptian Authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release the aforementioned human rights defenders and drop all the charges against them, as Front Line Defenders believes that they solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of the above human rights defenders, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the '*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Egypt and guarantee that in all circumstances they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders calls the EU and US diplomats to take all the necessary measures to ensure the release the arrested human rights defenders. and to ensure that Egyptian human rights defenders can meet with diplomats or UN officials without any act of reprisal