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Egypt: Arbitrary detention of human rights defender Mohsen Bahnasi amid growing COVID-19 concerns

On 27 March 2020, human rights defender **Mohsen Bahnasi** was violently arrested by national security agents. The next day, the Supreme Public Prosecution in Cairo ordered his detention for 15 days pending investigation. He is charged with 'joining a terrorist organisation' and 'spreading false news', in connection with his social media post, where he called for the release of Egyptian prisoners amidst the COVID-19 outbreak.

[Mohsen Bahnasi](#) is a human rights lawyer and member of the Freedoms Committee of the Egyptian Bar Association. He advocates for the rights of political prisoners in Egypt.

On 27 March 2020, Mohsen Bahnasi received a call from an individual who claimed that he needed urgent legal support and requested a meeting. Upon arrival to the meeting location, Mohsen Bahnasi was violently arrested by several national security agents who did not present a warrant. The agents took him to his house to carry out a search without a warrant. The defender's money and mobile phone were confiscated, and his family members were verbally abused.

After the house search, the human rights defender was transferred to an unknown location. It was later revealed that he was being held at Helwan National Security headquarters, where he was interrogated, physically abused, and placed in solitary confinement. He was not permitted to see his lawyer.

On 28 March 2020, the Supreme Public Prosecution ordered the detention of Mohsen Bahnasi for 15 days, pending investigation. He was charged with 'joining a terrorist organisation' and 'spreading false news', in connection with a social media post where he called for the release of Egyptian prisoners amidst the COVID-19 outbreak.

The human rights defender was transferred to Tora Prison, which is notorious for its inhumane, unhygienic conditions. While being held there, he is at great risk of contracting COVID-19. He has no access to his family or lawyer.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the arbitrary detention of human rights defender Mohsen Bahnasi, the charges brought against him and the physical abuse he has been subjected to, especially given the [growing concerns](#) about a potential COVID-19 outbreak in Egyptian prisons. Front Line Defenders believes that Mohsen Bahnasi is being targeted solely as a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights work and his exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders urges the Egyptian authorities to:

1. Immediately release Mohsen Bahnasi, and drop all charges against him, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Mohsen Bahnasi, 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. Allow Mohsen Bahnasi immediate and unfettered access to his family and lawyer;
4. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the physical abuse of the human rights defender, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
5. Return the mobile phone and money confiscated during the arrest, as they are manifestly not linked to any criminal activity;
6. Immediately and unconditionally release all arbitrarily detained human rights defenders, who are at a high risk of contracting COVID-19 while in detention, and 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.

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