

5 November 2021

Egypt – Human rights defender to be formally charged over a tweet

On 2 November 2021, human rights defender **Hossam Baghat** appeared before the Third Circuit for Misdemeanours of the Cairo Economic Court for Case No. 1592 of 2021, of which he is facing three charges: insulting a public institution, spreading false news with malicious intent and using an account on social media to commit the two aforementioned crimes. The Third Circuit for Misdemeanours of the Cairo Economic Court adjourned the case with and the verdict isscheduled to be announce on 29 November 2021.

[Hossam Bahgat](#) is a journalist and prominent human rights defender. His investigative stories appear in the independent news service Mada Masr. From 2002 to 2013, he was the founding executive director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights where he still serves as chairman.

On 2 November 2021, Hossam Baghat attended a court session at the Third Circuit for Misdemeanours of the Cairo Economic Court for which he faces three charges over a tweet he made in December 2020. The tweet, made on his personal Twitter account, criticised the former president of the National Election Authority, Lashin Ibrahim, for alleged corruption during that year's election. As a result of this tweet, Hossam Baghat was summoned for interrogation by the Public Prosecutor in Rehab city on 16 June 2021 due to a complaint over the tweet made by the acting president of the National Election Authority. The human rights defender is facing the charges of insulting a public institution, spreading false news with malicious intent and using an account on social media to commit the two aforementioned crimes. If convicted on these charges, Hossam Baghat faces a sentence of up to three years in prison and/or a fine of up to 300,000 Egyptian pounds (about 16,505 euros).

This is not the first time Hossam Baghat has been summoned due to his human rights work. In 2015, he was detained at the headquarters of the Military Intelligence for four days, pending investigation on charges of “publishing false news that harms national interests” and “disseminating information that disturbs public peace” for publishing reports about Egypt's military. On 23 February 2016, Hossam Bahgat was prevented by Egyptian authorities from travelling from Cairo International Airport to Jordan in order to participate in a United Nations conference on justice in the Arab world, and informed that he had been placed under a travel ban following an order of the Public Prosecutor. On 17 September 2016, the Cairo Criminal Court confirmed the order to freeze the personal funds and family assets of a number of human rights defenders and their organisations, including Hossam Baghat for allegedly illegally receiving foreign funding. The restrictions placed on the human rights defender are still in place.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned over the continued harassment and targeting Hossam Bahgat has faced due to his peaceful and legitimate human rights work and his exercise to the right of free speech.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Egypt to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Hossam Baghat as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;

2. 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 [including judicial harassment].

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