

9 March 2022

Content warning: sexual assault

Egypt: Woman human rights defender Rasha Azab charged with ‘slander’ and ‘defamation’

On 26 February 2022, woman human rights defender **Rasha Azab** was presented before the Public Prosecution in Al-Basatin, Cairo, for the second time on charges of ‘slander’ and ‘defamation’ brought against her by film director, Islam Azazi. The case has been adjourned until 12 March 2022.

[Rasha Azab](#) is a well-known journalist, screenwriter and peaceful advocate for freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and women’s rights. She is one of the founders of the *Kefaya* movement, which struggled against the despotism of Hosni Mubarak, and, post-Arab Spring, is one of the founders of the No Military Trials for Civilians Movement. She was taken to a military court during the era of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces due to the dissemination of information about the exposure of female detainees to virginity tests inside the detention facilities.

Starting in December 2020 a number of women published allegations of sexual assault against the prominent Egyptian Film Director, Islam Azazi on the website [Daftar Hekayat](#), which publishes anonymous testimonies by survivors of sexual assault, as a safe outlet for them to share their experience. The posts in question claim that the film director had sexually assaulted 6 women. The woman human rights defender Rasha Azab expressed her solidarity and support to the survivors of sexual assault on her personal Twitter account. Front Line Defenders is unaware of any credible investigation by the Egyptian authorities into the allegations of sexual assault made against Islam Azazi.

In January 2021, film director Islam Azazi took a civil case against woman human rights defender Rasha Azab, accusing her of ‘slander’ and ‘defamation’, in connection with her expression of solidarity with the aforementioned survivors of sexual assault. The civil case brought against Rasha Azab by the director was closed and filed in February 2021 due to the unsubstantiated nature of the allegations against the woman human rights defender.

The following month, Islam Azazi filed a grievance of financial damage, stating that his involvement with the Cairo International Film Festival was affected due to Rasha Azab’s statements. After Islam Azazi filed the grievance, the case against Rasha Azab was reopened in March 2021. However, the film director reportedly not only attended the Cairo International Film Festival, but had his film played there twice. In November and December 2021, the director’s statements of financial grievances and Rasha Azab’s statements of solidarity with survivors were added to the case file. The case file was transferred to the Financial and Administrative Affairs Prosecution on 20 January 2022. The case was then transferred to the Economic Court, where a decision to bring Rasha Azab to trial was made on 25 January 2022. This series of actions regarding the case raise serious concerns about due process. Front Line Defenders is concerned that Rasha Azab would not be pursued in this manner if she was not a prominent woman human rights defender, with a track record of speaking out against human rights violations in Egypt. Women’s rights organizations have expressed serious concern that the exceptional use of charges alleging defamation and financial damage in this case will have a chilling effect on all those women seeking justice in cases of sexual assault.

On 26 February 2022, woman human rights defender and journalist Rasha Azab was presented before the Public Prosecution in Al-Basatin, Cairo, on the charges of ‘slander’ and ‘defamation’, brought against her by Film Director, Islam Azazi, in relation to alleged financial damage caused by Rasha Azab’s solidarity with survivors of sexual assault. The case will be adjourned until 12 March

2022, wherein Rasha Azab will be tried according to Penal Code No. 58 of 1937 and Communications Regulatory Law No. 10 of 2003. If convicted, the woman human rights defender faces two years' imprisonment and a fine ranging between 20 and 500 thousand Egyptian Pounds (approximately €1,149 to €28,722).

Rasha Azab has previously been harassed for other aspects of her peaceful human rights work. On 13 October 2015, the Cairo Prosecutor interrogated Rasha Azab and five other activists for five hours before releasing them on bail without convictions on the same day. The Prosecutor had charged the human rights defenders with "organising an illegal protest", "inciting people to protest", "attacking police officers", "blocking the traffic", "chanting slogans against the army and the police" and "belonging to an illegal organisation", in relation to their involvement in two pro-democracy movements: 6th of April Movement and Revolutionary Socialists Movement. Since being released on bail, these charges against Rasha Azab and the five other activists were dropped.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the charges brought against the woman human rights defender and believes that the actions taken against her are solely motivated by her peaceful and legitimate human rights activities.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Egypt to:

1. Immediately dismiss the charges against Rasha Azab, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Algeria are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.