

14 May 2018

Egypt: Prosecution and detention of human rights defender Amal Fathy

On 11 May, the General Prosecution in Maadi, south of Cairo, ordered the detention of human rights defender **Amal Fathy** for making comments in a Facebook video about sexual harassment. Two days later, on 13 May, the State Security Prosecution ordered her detention in a separate case pending further investigation on charges of “joining a terrorist group and using the Internet to call for terrorist acts” and “spreading false news and rumours to disrupt public security and harm national interests”.

[Amal Fathy](#) is an online activist and a former member of the April 6 Youth Movement, a pro-democracy and human rights protest movement established by young activists in 2008. She is a member of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF), an organisation that works in several Egyptian governorates and founded by her husband, human rights defender and former Amnesty International researcher Mohamed Lotfy. It intensively campaigns against the use of torture, enforced disappearance and extra-judicial killings and provides free legal assistance to prisoners of conscience and political detainees. In April, ECRF was awarded the Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Award for 2018.

On 11 May at around 2:30 am, seven National Security Agency officers in civilian clothes and two masked armed officers from the Special Forces raided Amal Fathy and Mohamed Lotfy’s apartment in Maadi. They searched it, confiscated their mobile phones, arrested them and their three-year old child, and transferred them to Maadi Police Station. The police released Mohamed Lotfy and their child several hours later, but kept Amal Fathy in detention.

The human rights defender was interrogated that afternoon by a Maadi prosecutor who ordered that she be detained for 15 days pending an investigation into charges of “advocating the overthrow of the ruling government in Egypt”, “spreading false news on Facebook”, and “misusing social media”. The charges relate to a video posted by the human rights defender on her Facebook page in which she shared her experience of sexual harassment and criticised the state for failing to protect women. She blamed the government for the deterioration of public services and the country’s ailing economy.

During Amal Fathy’s interrogation on 11 May, the prosecutor informed her that she will be transferred to the State Security Prosecution to be interrogated about another case relating to her collaboration with hostile groups including members of the April 6 Youth Movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, to undermine the latest presidential election and trigger social unrest. This case (621/2018) also involves activist Sherif El-Roubi, blogger and YouTuber [Mohamed Ibrahim](#) (Mohamed Oxygen), and video blogger Shadi Abu Zaid. All remain in pre-trial detention.

Egyptian pro-government and state-owned newspapers had begun attacking Amal Fathy and her husband before their arrests; on 10 May several reports accused them of conspiring with foreign actors to undermine Egypt’s stability and institutions. Over the past

two years, leaders and members of the ECRF, including Ahmed Abdallah, have been subjected to detention and judicial harassment. Mohamed Lotfy was subject to a travel ban for almost two years from June 2015 for his involvement in international advocacy.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the detention of, and charges against human rights defender Amal Fathy, which it believes are due to her legitimate activities in defence of human rights and democracy. It also believes that the legal action that has been taken against her is an act of reprisal and intimidation against the human rights work of the ECRF.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Egypt to:

1. Drop all charges against Amal Fathy as Front Line Defenders believes that she is being detained and has been charged solely as a result of her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Amal Fathy, ensure her liberty and security and cease all forms of harassment against her and other ECRF members.
3. Cease targeting human rights defenders in Egypt 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.