

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# EGYPT: JOINT STATEMENT: RIGHTS DEFENDER'S RELATIVES ARRESTED: MIDNIGHT RAIDS, DISAPPEARANCES FOLLOW TORTURE COMPLAINT

The ongoing harassment and intimidation by Egyptian security forces of the family of a US national seeking justice, truth and reparation is a source of deep concern, 20 human rights and other groups said today.

According to a statement filed in a US court by Mohamed Soltan, the human rights defender, Egyptian security forces raided the homes of his Egypt-based relatives on June 9, 2020 and again on June 15, each time in the dead of night. On June 15, security forces arrested and then subjected five of Soltan's male cousins, ages 20 to 24, to enforced disappearance for two days. The raids were apparently in reprisal for [Soltan's filing suit](#) in a US court on June 1, under the Torture Victim Protection Act, against former Egyptian Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawy for alleged torture and other human rights violations.

"Egypt should immediately release Soltan's relatives and stop harassing and intimidating his family," said Neil Hicks, senior director for advocacy at the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. "These reprisals appear aimed at obstructing justice and silencing Egyptian activists, even if they are no longer in Egypt."

Egyptian authorities must immediately release Soltan's relatives and end the systemic reprisals against human rights activists and their relatives, the organizations said.

The arrested cousins, according to lawyers, appeared on June 17 before [the Supreme State Security Prosecution](#) in Cairo, a branch of the Public Prosecution specialized in investigating national security threats. Prosecutors questioned the five relatives over charges of "spreading false news" and joining an unnamed "terrorist organization" and ordered their detention for 15 days pending investigations.

The first raids occurred shortly after 1 a.m. on 9 June, when about 20 armed police officers, some in uniform and some in civilian clothing, raided the apartments of family members in a building in Berket al-Sab' town in the Menofia governorate. According to the affidavit Soltan submitted to the US court on 16 June, the officers searched the apartments, examined the family's phones, computers and other devices, and questioned them about Soltan. They left without making any arrests or confiscating equipment.

At around 1 a.m. on June 15, security forces raided the home of Soltan's uncle in Alexandria, the affidavit says. After searching the apartment, they arrested two of his male cousins, Hamza Soltan, 20, and Esmat Soltan, 23. The officers gave no reason for the arrests, showed no arrest warrants, and did not inform the family where they were taking the two men.

At around the same time on June 15, more than 15 armed members of security forces entered the same apartments of Soltan's family members in the Menofia governorate that they had raided on June 9, and arrested three other cousins, Mahmoud Soltan, 21, Ahmed Soltan, 23, and Mostafa Soltan, 24. The policemen also confiscated phones and laptops, but showed no warrants and refused to say where they were taking the men.

Soltan said he believed the arrests were made to "force him drop the case" against al-Beblawy.

Soltan also said that on 15 June, unidentified policemen visited his father, Salah Soltan, in Wadi al-Natroun prison, where he has been serving a life sentence, and interrogated him about several members of Soltan's family. The next morning the authorities moved him to an undisclosed location. The authorities had arrested Salah Soltan in 2013 and prosecuted him in several cases related to political activities opposing the Egyptian military's removal of President Mohamed Morsy in July 2013.

On 1 June, Soltan filed suit in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia under the Torture Victim Protection Act, a federal law that allows claims against officials in foreign countries for torture and extrajudicial killing. Egyptian security forces' actions against Soltan's family at the apparent direction of the Egyptian government, appear to be an attempt to prevent Soltan from seeking justice, truth and reparation in the United States, the organizations said.

In his suit, Soltan alleges that al-Beblawy was among those responsible for his attempted extrajudicial execution, and his torture during his detention in Cairo between 2013 and 2015. Al-Beblawy currently lives in the United States and is an executive director for Egypt and several Arab countries with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The suit also names a number of other "unsued" defendants, including Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the current Egyptian president and the defense minister at the time of the dispersal and arrest of protesters in Rab'a Square that led to Soltan's torture; Gen. Mohamed Ibrahim, the former interior minister; and Gen. Mahmoud Sayed Sha'rawi, the former assistant interior minister and deputy director of the National Security Agency.

The Egyptian government has increasingly targeted [human rights activists](#) in Egypt with arrests, travel bans and asset freezes, in addition to intimidating, harassing and [arresting relatives](#) of Egyptian activists abroad.

### **THE SIGNATORY GROUPS ARE:**

Amnesty International

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Center for Constitutional Rights

Committee for Justice

Egyptian Front for Human Rights

EuroMed Rights

Freedom House

Frontline Defenders

Human Rights First

Human Rights Watch

International Federation for Human Rights

James Fooley foundation

Open Society Foundation

Project for Middle East Democracy

Reprive

The Center for Victims of Torture

The Egyptian Human Rights Forum

The Freedom Initiative

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

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