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Human Rights Council: Countries Should Take Bold Action on Egypt

Monitoring, Tough Message on Dire Rights Situation Long Overdue

(Geneva - February 9, 2021) -- Egypt's human rights community is facing "annihilation" by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government, more than 100 leading human rights organizations from around the world have warned in a [letter](#) to foreign ministers.

The groups called on governments to lead and support the creation of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the ever-deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt at the upcoming 46th regular session of the United Nations Human Rights Council scheduled to begin on February 22, 2021. Establishing a monitoring and reporting mechanism would serve as an important step in raising the profile of the violations and crimes committed, providing remedies for survivors and victims' families, deterring further abuses, and establishing pathways for accountability.

"Governments at the UN Human Rights Council should send the overdue message to the Egyptian government that abuses are and will be monitored and reported and that brave Egyptians facing oppression every day are not alone in their struggle," said John Fisher, Geneva Director at Human Rights Watch.

Ten years after the 2011 Egyptian nationwide uprising that ousted President Hosni Mubarak, Egyptians are living under a repressive government that is stifling all forms of dissent and peaceful expression. Recent weeks [have shown](#) that collective action is both possible and can have an impact. "Only through sustained and committed international action can we ensure the survival of the Egyptian human rights movement in the coming period," the groups said in their letter.

According to groups that joined the letter the struggle for human rights in Egypt is at a "critical juncture." Inaction by Egypt's partners and Human Rights Council member states has emboldened the Egyptian government "in its efforts to silence dissent and crush independent civil society."

The recent shocking [arrests and investigation](#) of senior staff of the [Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights \(EIPR\)](#), and the freezing of their assets in abusive proceedings in front of a "terrorism circuit" of a criminal court represent an "[abhorrent](#) and unacceptable attack" against one of the most prominent human rights organizations in the country, the groups said. It demonstrates the Egyptian government's determination to escalate its sustained, widespread, and [systematic attacks](#) against human rights defenders and [civic space](#).

Since the ousting of former President Mohamed Morsi from power in July 2013, the Egyptian authorities have waged an [increasingly brutal](#) crackdown on human rights defenders and civil and

political rights more broadly. Thousands of Egyptians, including hundreds of human rights defenders, journalists, academics, artists and politicians, have been [arbitrarily detained](#), frequently on abusive criminal charges or through unfair trials.

Egyptian security forces have systematically subjected them to ill-treatment and [torture](#). UN experts have [warned](#) that catastrophic detention conditions have endangered detainees' lives and health. Other peaceful activists have been forcibly disappeared. What happened to some of them has never been revealed.

“The people of Egypt have lived under despotic governments before, but current levels of repression in Egypt are unprecedented in its modern history,” said Bahey El-din Hassan, Director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. *“The consequences are potentially terrible for both human rights and regional stability.”* In August of last year Mr. Hassan was [sentenced to 15 years in prison in absentia](#) by a Terrorism Circuit Court in Egypt for his human rights advocacy work.

In such [a severely repressive environment](#), many human rights organizations have been forced to [close](#), scale down their operations, operate from outside the country, or work under constant risk of arrests and harassment.

The government typically invokes “counterterrorism” to justify these abuses and to criminalize freedom of association and expression. UN experts have [warned](#) about Egypt’s use of “terrorism circuits” of criminal courts to target human rights defenders, silence dissent, and lock up activists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Faced with these repeated warnings, the UN Human Rights Council has a responsibility to act and ensure robust reporting and international scrutiny over the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt, the groups said.

“The survival of the embattled human rights movement in Egypt is at stake,” said Kevin Whelan, Amnesty International representative to the UN in Geneva. *“Members of the international community have the responsibility to support efforts to establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism at the Human Rights Council on the situation in Egypt, signalling that Egypt’s disregard for human rights will no longer be ignored or tolerated.”*

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