

URGENT ACTION

WOMEN INFLUENCERS JAILED FOR 'INDECENCY'

Egyptian women social media influencers Hanin Hossam and Mawada el-Adham were convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms by Cairo's Criminal Court on 20 June for inciting "indecent" content, human trafficking and other offences. Amnesty International believes that the young women are being punished for the way they dance, talk, dress and attempt to "influence" the public on social media and calls for their immediate release.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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Your Excellency,

*Social media influencers 22-year-old **Hanin Hossam** and 20-year-old **Mawada el-Adham** were convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms and fines by Cairo's Criminal Court on 20 June for inciting young women to broadcast "indecent" content on social media to earn money, commercial exploitation, human trafficking and other offences. Amnesty International believes that they are being punished for the way they dance, talk, dress and attempt to "influence" the public online, amid the authorities' crackdown on women's freedom of expression and attempts to police women's conduct online.*

The human trafficking charge relates to videos the women had posted online. In the Instagram video that led to her conviction, Hanin Hossam, who has over one million followers on TikTok, encouraged women over the age of 18 to post videos of themselves on the application 'Likee' that is monetized based on the number of viewers. Mawada el-Adham, who has over three million followers on TikTok, was convicted based on TikTok videos showing her dancing with a six-year old girl and jokingly asking her if she was dating. In court, the girl's parents raised the issue of their consent to post the videos online. Amnesty International reviewed the videos and found no credible evidence linking the two women to acts that would amount to trafficking in persons as defined by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

During the issuing of the verdict, the presiding judge [openly expressed](#) bias and hostility against the women, accusing them of tarnishing the nation's morals and warning against using social media tools to undermine Egypt's values and morals. To date, the women's lawyers have not received a written reasoned judgment. Hanin Hossam, who was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in her absence, was rearrested on 22 June and is now awaiting retrial. Mawada el-Adham has appealed her six-year prison sentence. They are both being held in al-Qanater Prison for women.

I urge you to quash Hanin Hossam and Mawada el-Adham's sentences and release them immediately as they are being punished for their conduct online in the name of "morality" and "decency", protect their rights to privacy, freedom of expression, non-discrimination and bodily autonomy, and put an end to the wider crackdown on women social media influencers in Egypt.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since April 2020, the authorities have intensified their crackdown on social media influencers in an apparent attempt to control cyber space by policing women's bodies and conduct and by undermining their ability to earn an independent living. Since then, the Egyptian authorities have arrested and prosecuted ten women TikTok influencers for violating the draconian cyber-crimes law, and other overly vague legal provisions related to "decency" and "inciting immorality". Those prosecuted all have large followings on social media, ranging from hundreds of thousands to several million. Nine of the 10 women were sentenced to prison terms ranging between two and six years and heavy fines. The arrests of the ten women came following complaints made mainly by male content creators purportedly outraged by the women's behaviour and investigations by the Morality Directorate of the Ministry of Interior. According to Hanin Hossam's police investigation report, which was reviewed by Amnesty International, the role of the directorate is to "prosecute those using online applications and websites to publish content inciting citizens, especially young people, to act in a way that contravenes with customs and traditions, or spread ideas and acts of immorality and debauchery in society." On 29 April 2020, shortly after Hanin Hossam's arrest, the public prosecution issued a [statement](#) "reaffirm[ing] its commitment to continue fighting shameful crimes violating the principles and values of our society", warning again [on 2 May](#) that Egypt was protecting the "new cyber border... abused by forces of evil".

The authorities arrested Hanin Hossam on 21 April 2020 and Mawada el-Adham on 14 May 2020 and referred them to trial on charges of "violating family principles and values" and inciting "indecent" and "debauchery". On 27 July 2020, a Misdemeanours Cairo Economic Court convicted and sentenced them to two years in prison and a fine of 300,000 EGP (around 19,000 USD) each. On 12 January 2021, an appeal court acquitted Hanin Hossam for lack of incriminating evidence, and commuted Mawada el-Adham's sentence to a fine. However, the public prosecution indicted them on separate charges including human trafficking and referred them to criminal court. Hanin Hossam was released on bail on 2 February 2021 but re-arrested on 22 June 2021. Mawada el-Adham has been held in pre-trial detention since her arrest. They are both being held in al-Qanater Prison for women.

Following the ruling by the Cairo Criminal Court on 20 June, Hanin Hossam appeared in a video on Instagram expressing her shock over the lengthy sentence and appealing to the president: "What did I do? 10 years! Since I was released (after nine months of pre-trial detention), I did not speak out or complain or say that I was unjustly detained or suffered (...) Why do you want to jail me again?". She also expressed her confusion for being punished for her involvement in promoting the Likee application as it was legal in Egypt.

Three men were convicted and sentenced to six years in prison and a fine of 200,000 EGP (around 12,800 USD) each in relation to the same case purportedly for assisting Hanin Hossam and Mawada al-Adham to commit human trafficking. According to police investigations in this case dated 23 April 2020 and examined by Amnesty International, ten suspects were accused of "establishing a criminal group", including four Chinese executives of Bigo Limited company, which owns the Likee application. The company remains legally registered in Egypt, and investigations against its executives were closed. In a meeting with the Chinese ambassador in Cairo on 30 August 2020, the Public Prosecutor [confirmed](#) that no legal actions had been taken against the company and its executives "in light of the distinction between the personal responsibility and the company's responsibility". In his turn, the Chinese ambassador expressed his respect for the customs and traditions of the Egyptian society.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 8 September 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Hanin Hossam (she/her), Mawada el-Adham (she/her)