



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Egypt – January to June 2023

30 June 2023

02 January 2023

Four persons killed in ISIS attack

Three police officers were reportedly killed and at least 12 others, the majority of whom were recruits, were wounded in an armed attack carried out at a police checkpoint in the north-western city of Ismailia on 30.12.22. The fourth person killed is believed to have been one of the insurgents, according to reports by state media.

16 January 2023

Military court sentences numerous persons to life imprisonment and several years in prison

On 15.01.23, according to state media reports, a military court sentenced 38 persons to life imprisonment; 23 of them were sentenced in absentia. Another 44 persons received jail terms ranging from five to 15 years. They were charged with inciting violence against security forces and state institutions in connection with the protests that took place in September 2019.

Among those convicted in absentia is Spain-based businessman and actor Mohamed Ali, whose videos released in 2019 accusing President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and the military elite of corruption, sparked a brief wave of protests in Egypt in September 2019. Some 4,000 people were reportedly arrested by security authorities in the wake of the protests.

30 January 2023

Businessmen released after two years in detention

On 21.01.23, the founder and former head of one of the largest juice and dairy companies in Egypt and his son were released from prison, according to reports in the media. Safwan and Seifeldin Thabet, who were imprisoned for allegedly belonging to and funding a terrorist organisation in December 2020 and February 2021 respectively, were never convicted. The family have denied the accusations made by the authorities. According to Amnesty International, the real reason for the arrest of the two entrepreneurs was their refusal to hand over assets to a state institution.

13 February 2023

More bloggers arrested

At the end of January 2023, according to media reports, at least one female blogger and two male bloggers were arrested by security authorities and were charged with spreading false news, misusing social media and being members of a terrorist organisation. Shortly before, the detained had shared their homemade satirical video that talks about visiting a detainee inside the police station.

In the past few years, individuals have repeatedly been arrested sometimes for their even non-political posts on social media and have convicted them, inter alia, of spreading false news. According to human rights organisations, the authorities have continued to crack down on the media with the help of the media law passed in 2018, especially social media, which is often more difficult to regulate.

20 February 2023

Inhumane conditions at the new Badr prison complex

Local and international human rights organisations have described how inmates at the new prison complex "Badr Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre" located around 60 km northeast of the capital which opened at the end of 2021, continue to be subjected to inhumane conditions, such as a lack of food and clothing, solitary confinement, sleep deprivation and a lack of vital medical care. The state authorities have not yet commented on the accusations made but claim that the prison complex, which also houses numerous political prisoners, is equipped with modern workplaces, sports facilities and a hospital and was built to counteract overcrowding in other prisons.

Egyptian Christians released after kidnapping

It has been reported in the media that in the week of 06.02.23 to 12.02.23, six Coptic Christian workers from Egypt were kidnapped by an armed group at a Libyan checkpoint in order to extort a ransom. According to the Egyptian embassy, they were released on 18.02.23.

Time and again, armed groups kidnap people in Libya to extort money, intimidate opposition members and put pressure on political decision-makers.

06 March 2023

Activists handed lengthy prison sentences by special court

According to media reports, on 05.03.23, four human rights activists were sentenced to prison terms of up to 15 years by a special court for their alleged actions related to terrorism. The convicted persons, who were arrested by security authorities in October and November 2018, were members of the non-governmental organisation "Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms", an organisation that documented enforced disappearances and the use of the death penalty and provided legal assistance to victims of human rights violations. Shortly after the activists were arrested, it suspended its work.

Judgments by emergency state security courts cannot be appealed to a higher court; only the president of the state has the power to overturn or commute judgments, among other things. With the end of the state of emergency in October 2021, no new cases have been opened before these special courts, but cases already pending to date will continue to be heard before the emergency state security courts.

20 March 2023

Issuance of identity documents for dissidents living abroad made more difficult

According to reports issued by an international human rights organisation, the authorities have refused to issue or renew identity documents, such as birth certificates, passports and ID cards, for numerous dissidents, media professionals and human rights activists abroad in recent years. This has reportedly had a negative impact on the people affected and their family members, for instance, undermining their ability to travel and work as well as to gain access to healthcare and education.

03 April 2023

Rising inflation and food prices put increasing pressure on population

Numerous media report that rising inflation, which reached over 30 percent in February 2023, one of the highest levels in five and a half years, and the resulting increase in food prices, some of which have almost doubled, are a burden on a large part of the Egyptian population, with poorer sections in particular facing difficulties in accessing basic food items. As the largest and most populous Arab country, Egypt needs to import not only grain but numerous food items from abroad. The government blames external crises such as the Ukraine war and the

COVID19 pandemic for the poor economic situation, but international observers say that internal government problems such as corruption and mismanagement are also contributing factors. In addition to financial support from the Gulf states, Egypt has received several loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since 2016; in return, economic reforms were foreseen, albeit with limited success so far. Subject to conditions like a flexible exchange rate for the Egyptian pound and the withdrawal of the Egyptian army from the economy, a fourth IMF aid package of three billion USD was approved in December 2022. In February 2023, President Al-Sisi announced that his country plans to strengthen the private sector by 2025 and privatise numerous state-controlled companies and banks, while at the same time reducing state expenses.

17 April 2023

LGBTIQ dating app warns users about fake accounts

A US dating app for LGBTIQ people has warned its users in Egypt to be careful about sharing personal information and arranging meetings. The company said the warning was due to an increase in attempts by Egyptian security authorities to arrest LGBTIQ people using hacked or falsified profiles.

According to reports from local human rights organisations and activists, Egyptian security authorities have been systematically arresting LGBTIQ people through the use of social networks and dating apps over the past decade; however, the number of people affected has remained largely the same over this period.

Although homosexuality is not explicitly banned in Egypt, those involved are often charged with fornication, shameless behaviour in public or violating religious teachings.

Arrest of female influencers

As media reports indicate, the authorities continue to crack down on female social media influencers. In early April 2023, another woman was arrested for posting pictures and videos from her daily life, on the grounds that it violates morality and morals and contributes to the undermining of family values. Various sources report that since 2020, more than a dozen female influencers have been arrested under a 2018 cybercrime law specifically targeting online content. Human Rights Watch has stated that Egyptian authorities are using the law to target women on social media and restrict their freedom of expression.

08 May 2023

Al Jazeera journalist released after nearly four years in prison

On 01.05.23, the authorities reportedly released Egyptian journalist Hisham Abdel Aziz of the Qatari news channel Al Jazeera from pre-trial detention after nearly four years in prison. The journalist, who had been arrested during a family visit in 2019, was accused of spreading false news and belonging to a terrorist organisation. According to the Qatari news channel, two of his colleagues remain in detention; they were also arrested during a visit to their home country.

15 May 2023

81 people added to the national 'terrorism' list

By the end of April 2023, the authorities reportedly classified at least 81 people as terrorists and placed them on the (national) terrorism list which had been introduced in 2015 as part of the anti-terror legislation. The list includes many human rights activists as well as media workers, some of whom are apparently staying abroad. Human rights groups have criticized the authorities' move as arbitrary and a tool to silence dissent.

Individuals and groups classified as terrorist can be subjected to restrictive measures for up to five years after which the listing and accompanying measures can be renewed by the authorities. These measures include travel bans, the confiscation of passports, the prevention of obtaining or renewing of passports, and the freezing or confiscation of assets.

Family members and acquaintances of opposition politician arrested

Since the end of April 2023, the security authorities have reportedly arrested twelve family members and acquaintances of former MP and opposition politician Ahmed Tantawy on the orders of the public prosecutor. They

are charged with membership of a terrorist organisation; some of them are also accused of possessing firearms, explosives and publications that endanger public security. Tantawy, who had lived in Lebanon since August 2022 due to security concerns but has apparently returned to his home country on 11.05.23, announced in March 2023 that he intended to run in next year's presidential elections. Human rights organisations suspect that the arrests are politically motivated to intimidate him.

22 May 2023

Women detained because of family ties to alleged IS members

According to a report by a local and international human rights organisation, the Egyptian authorities have arbitrarily detained women and underage girls in the north of the Sinai Peninsula because of their family ties to alleged IS members. During their detention, which lasted several months or even years, the women were tortured in order to extract information about their relatives or to put pressure on them. Some of the women and girls had reportedly been themselves subjected to abuse, including rape and forced marriage, by IS-affiliated groups. When they fled or sought help from the authorities, some of them were arrested, the report said.

05 June 2023

Members of the Israeli defence force and Egyptian security officials killed in gun battle at border

The Israeli military has informed that on 03.06.23, two members of their forces were shot dead by an Egyptian security officer who apparently crossed the border fence. In a subsequent exchange of fire between the Egyptian official and other Israeli security forces, another member of the Israeli military was killed. On the same day, the Egyptian military stated that the incident was related to an operation to thwart drug smuggling on the Egypt-Israel border. Both countries have assured to jointly investigate the incident.

19 June 2023

Death penalty carried out

Local and international media report the execution of a man on 14.06.23 at Gamasa General Prison who had been convicted of the murder of a female student on 20.06.22. Prior to the crime, the victim had rejected the perpetrator's proposal of marriage. According to the court, the man confessed to the crime.

According to Amnesty International, the Egyptian authorities issued 538 death sentences in 2022, of which 24 were carried out. Human rights organisations criticise that death sentences can be handed down in the context of unfair trials and using evidence obtained through torture and enforced disappearances.

Activist arrested and disappeared for over three weeks

Media reports indicate that Moaz al-Sharqawy, an activist and former president of a student union, was arrested by security forces at his home on 11.05.23 and subsequently detained for 23 days without legal assistance or information about his whereabouts. During this time, he was reportedly subjected to ill-treatment and torture. On 03.06.23, al-Sharqawy was brought before the public prosecutor who ordered his detention for a further 15 days pending investigations into his alleged membership and financing of a terrorist organisation. He has reportedly been held in the Badr prison since then. In May 2022, the activist had been sentenced to ten years in prison by an emergency state security court on charges of membership of a terrorist organisation; however, the sentence has not yet been confirmed by the President of the state and could therefore still have been set aside. Sentences handed down by emergency state security courts cannot be appealed to a higher court; only the President has the power to overturn or commute them. With the end of the state of emergency in October 2021, no new trials have been opened before these special courts, but trials already underway to date will continue to be heard by the emergency state security courts.

New visa requirements for Sudanese nationals

According to media reports, the Egyptian authorities announced changes to the entry regulations for Sudanese nationals on 10.06.23. From now on, all Sudanese will need a visa to enter Egypt; previously, Sudanese women, children under 16 and people over 50 were exempt from the visa requirement. The Egyptian authorities said the

move was intended to stop illegal activities such as fraud. It is estimated that around 200,000 Sudanese nationals have entered Egypt since the outbreak of fighting in Sudan in April 2023. According to the IOM, four million Sudanese were living in Egypt before April 2023.

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