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In 2015, Egypt held parliamentary elections, completing the final institutional stage on its road map for political transition. At the same time, Egypt faced a significant terrorist threat, resulting in at least 366 deaths (in addition to the attack on the Metrojet aircraft that killed 224 people). Against this background, the human rights situation remained poor and continued to deteriorate.

Although 2015 saw pardons for a small number of prisoners, Egypt continued to detain activists, journalists and protesters. In February, 230 activists were sentenced to life imprisonment in a mass trial in relation to protests in 2011. In May, former President Mohamed Morsi was sentenced to

death in a mass trial with more than 100 others. Pre-trial detention periods were long; photojournalist Mahmoud Abu Zeid (Shawkan) has been in pre-trial detention since August 2013.

In 2015, reports of torture, police brutality, and forced disappearance increased. A local NGO documented reports of 676 cases of torture and 137 deaths in detention. The National Council for Human Rights submitted a list of 191 alleged forced disappearances to the Ministry of the Interior, which responded that 99 of those on the list were in detention and 15 had been released.

Restrictions on civil society further limited the ability of NGOs to register, work and obtain funding, and a number of prominent human rights defenders were banned from travelling.

Restrictions on freedom of expression also increased. A new counter-terrorism law banned publication of information about terrorism that contradicts official statements. The number of journalists jailed for their work rose to 23, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Protester Shaimaa al-Sabbagh was killed by police during a peaceful protest in January.

During 2015 we worked to support implementation of the rights set out in Egypt's new (2014) constitution. We did this by:

- raising concerns at senior levels about human rights and our desire to see political reform, including during the Prime Minister's meeting with President Sisi in November;
- making public statements on issues of concern, including the trial of Al Jazeera journalists and the sentencing of political activists;
- raising concerns about human rights in Egypt in multilateral fora, including in our national statements at the UN Human Rights Council and during Egypt's Universal Periodic Review (UPR);
- funding projects promoting human rights and democracy in Egypt, including those that supported women's rights, freedom of expression and the Parliament;
- raising the importance of freedom of religion or belief with the Egyptian authorities, and promoting religious dialogue, including by hosting a visit to the UK by the Grand Imam of Al Azhar; and
- deploying a gender adviser to Cairo in support of work on women's rights.

In 2016, Parliament will be a key institution in implementing constitutional rights and improving accountability. 2016 will also be an opportunity for Egypt to make progress on recommendations accepted during its UPR. The UK will support Egyptian government and civil society initiatives to improve the human rights situation, by continuing to raise concerns both in public and private, and through project funding. Our focus will be on detentions of political activists, police abuses, and restrictions on civil society. Improving the current trajectory is fundamental to Egypt's long-term stability.

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