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Arab Republic of Egypt

Head of state: **Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (replaced Adly Mansour in June)**

Head of government: **Ibrahim Mahlab (replaced Hazem Beblawi in March)**

The year saw a continued dramatic deterioration in human rights following the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013. The government severely restricted freedoms of expression, association and assembly. Thousands were arrested and detained as part of a sweeping crackdown on dissent, with some detainees subjected to enforced disappearance. The Muslim Brotherhood remained banned and its leaders were detained and jailed. Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remained routine and was committed with impunity. Hundreds were sentenced to prison terms or to death after grossly unfair trials. Security forces used excessive force against protesters and committed unlawful killings with impunity. Women faced discrimination and violence. Some refugees were forcibly returned. Forced evictions continued. Dozens of people faced arrest and prosecution for their sexual orientation or identity. Courts imposed hundreds of death sentences; the first executions since 2011 were carried out in June.

Background

Presidential elections in May saw former army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi elected as President. He took office in June, and in September pledged to uphold freedom of expression, judicial independence and the rule of law in a speech to the UN General Assembly. In practice, his government clamped down on free expression, widened the jurisdiction of military courts to try civilians, and allowed security forces to use torture and excessive force with impunity.

Over 1,400 people were killed in protests between July 2013, when Mohamed Morsi was ousted as President, and the end of 2014. The vast majority were killed by security forces dispersing sit-ins by Morsi supporters at Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda Squares in Greater Cairo on 14 August 2013. The crackdown also saw the arrest and detention or imprisonment of at least 16,000 people, according to official estimates published by the Associated Press news agency, with the activist group Wikithawra later estimating that over 40,000 people had been detained, charged or indicted. Most of those detained were Muslim Brotherhood supporters but they also included left-wing and secular activists and other government critics.

An upsurge in lethal attacks on the security forces by armed groups led to the deaths of at least 445 soldiers and security officers, according to official statements. Most attacks took place in Sinai, where at least 238 security forces officers were killed. After renewed attacks in October, the government declared a state of emergency in North Sinai, imposed a curfew, closed Egypt's border with Gaza, and began constructing a "buffer" zone along it. Military reinforcements launched a "combing" operation to identify what they called "militants" within the area's population, posing a risk of further human rights violations.^[1]

International scrutiny

Members of the UN Human Rights Council examined Egypt's human rights record under the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism in November, recommending that the authorities combat torture, investigate excessive use of force by security forces, and lift restrictions on civil society. With the exception of the UPR, Egypt largely evaded international scrutiny in spite of the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

Freedom of expression

The authorities targeted those who criticized the government or expressed dissent. Media workers who documented rights violations or questioned the authorities' political narrative faced arrest and prosecution. Journalists who reported on army activities faced unfair trials before military courts.^[2]

In June, a court in Cairo sentenced three staff members of the Al Jazeera English television station to between seven and 10 years' imprisonment after a grossly unfair trial. The court convicted Mohamed Fahmy, a Canadian-Egyptian dual national; Peter Grete, an Australian; and Baher Mohamed, an Egyptian, on charges that included aiding the Muslim Brotherhood and reporting "false" news. The prosecution failed to produce any substantive evidence against them, or against other media workers who were tried in their absence.

Some individuals faced prosecution and imprisonment on charges such as "inciting sectarian strife" and/or "defamation of religion". The authorities also increased monitoring of social media.

Freedom of association

The authorities shut down groups linked to the banned Muslim Brotherhood group and other centres of opposition, and imposed onerous new restrictions on human rights organizations.

In April, the 6 April Youth Movement, one of the activist groups that led the 2011 uprising, was banned by a court which ruled that some of its members had committed offences that would "disturb peace and public order".

In August, a court dissolved the Freedom and Justice Party, which was founded by the Muslim Brotherhood and won the largest number of seats in Egypt's 2012 parliamentary elections.

Human rights organizations faced threats of closure and criminal prosecution, forcing many activists to scale down their work or leave the country. In July, the Ministry of Social Solidarity gave NGOs a 45-day deadline, later extended to November, to register under the repressive Law on Associations (Law 84 of 2002), warning that it would hold groups that failed to register "accountable". The Ministry later announced that it would deal with NGOs on a case-by-case basis, following criticism from other states during Egypt's UPR.

The authorities disrupted peaceful NGO activities, raiding the Alexandria offices of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights in May when it held a conference to support detained human rights activists.

In September, the government amended the Penal Code to prohibit the funding of acts harmful to Egypt's national interest, territorial integrity or public peace. The government also proposed a new Law on Associations that, if enacted, would give the authorities additional powers to deny NGOs legal registration and curtail their activities and funding.

In November, Egypt's Cabinet approved draft legislation which, if passed, would give the authorities sweeping powers to classify organizations as terrorist entities.

Freedom of assembly

Security forces ruthlessly suppressed protests, and courts jailed scores of people for protesting without authorization, among them supporters of Mohamed Morsi, prominent opposition activists, and left-wing and human rights activists.^[3] The authorities continued to enforce Law 107 of 2013 on protests, which required demonstrations to have prior authorization; security forces used excessive force against peaceful protesters.

Women university students Abrar Al-Anany and Menatalla Moustafa, and a woman teacher, Yousra Elkhateeb, were jailed in May for between two and six years for protesting peacefully at Mansoura University.

In November, a court in Alexandria sentenced 78 children to prison terms of between two and five years after convicting them of participating in an unauthorized protest in support of Mohamed Morsi.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Thousands of actual and suspected government opponents were arrested during protests, at their homes or on the street. Many were not informed of the reason for their arrest and were arbitrarily detained and held in pre-trial detention for periods that in some cases exceeded one year, or else were brought before the courts and sentenced to lengthy prison terms after unfair trials. Many were also beaten or ill-treated during arrest or in detention. In some instances, security forces seized family members or friends if the wanted person was not present.

Enforced disappearances

Some detainees were subjected to enforced disappearance and held in secret detention at Al Azouly Prison within the Al Galaa military camp in Ismailia, 130km northeast of Cairo. Detainees were held at Al Galaa without official acknowledgement and were denied access to lawyers and their families. Detainees, who included alleged protest leaders and people accused of terrorism-related offences, were held at the camp for up to 90 days without judicial oversight and faced torture and other ill-treatment by military intelligence and National Security Agency (NSA) officers to extract "confessions". Public prosecutors told families of the disappeared that they had no jurisdiction over military prisons.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment of criminal suspects was routinely used to extract confessions and punish and humiliate suspects. It reportedly led to several deaths of detainees. NSA officials particularly targeted members and alleged supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, some of whom they held and reportedly tortured in unofficial detention facilities, including NSA offices across the country.

Commonly reported methods of torture included electric shocks to the genitals and other sensitive areas, beating, suspension by the limbs while handcuffed from behind, stress positions, beatings and rape.

Al Azhar university student Omar Gamal El Shewiekh said that security officials arrested and tortured him after he participated in a protest in Cairo in March. He said that NSA officials subjected him to electric shocks and repeatedly inserted objects into his anus until he "confessed" to crimes on video. In May a court sentenced him to five years in prison on the basis of the forced "confession".

Deaths in detention were reported, with some apparently attributable to torture or other ill-treatment or inadequate conditions in police stations.^[4]

Ezzat Abdel Fattah died in Cairo's Mattareya Police Station in May. A post-mortem report issued by the forensic authority found that he had injuries that included nine broken ribs, cuts and concussion.

The authorities failed to conduct genuine investigations into allegations of torture. When prosecutors did investigate, they generally closed cases citing lack of evidence. In some cases, victims and their families said that police threatened them to make them withdraw torture allegations.

Impunity

The criminal justice system failed to hold any members of the security forces accountable for gross human rights violations committed during the 2013 unrest, including the mass killings of pro-Morsi protesters at Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda Squares on 14 August 2013. On 7 June, an appeals court quashed the verdicts against four police officers convicted of killing 37 detainees in August 2013.

A court retrying former President Hosni Mubarak on charges of killing protesters during the 2011 uprising dismissed the case against him in November on a legal technicality. His Interior Minister and several security officials were also acquitted of the same charges.

A government-appointed fact-finding committee, established after security forces killed hundreds of protesters on 14 August 2013, announced its findings in November. Ignoring disparities between security forces casualties and protesters, it concluded that protesters had started the violence. The committee downplayed human rights violations by security forces, merely calling for them to receive training in policing demonstrations.

Unfair trials

Courts throughout Egypt sentenced hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition activists to long prison terms or to death after grossly unfair trials, often on trumped-up charges. Courts also sentenced children to death in contravention of international and Egyptian law.

Former President Mohamed Morsi faced four trials, including for capital offences. Other senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood were imprisoned and sentenced to death.

Trials before the criminal courts were riddled with due process violations. Some trials proceeded in the absence of the defendants and their lawyers. In others, judges prevented defendants or their lawyers from presenting evidence in their own defence or cross-examining prosecution witnesses. In many cases, courts convicted defendants despite an absence of substantive evidence against them.

Many trials were conducted within the Tora Police Institute, adjacent to the Tora Prison Complex, with families and independent media unable to attend. Defendants were also unable to communicate with their lawyers during court sessions because they were confined behind a dark glass screen.

The Public Prosecution increasingly did not seek to determine individual criminal responsibility, instead bringing identical charges against groups of accused, and relied heavily on reports and testimonies by police and security forces. The impartiality and independence of the investigations were thus brought into question.

In October, President al-Sisi decreed that military courts could try civilians for offences against "vital public facilities". It was feared that the decision would see a return to mass unfair trials of civilians before military courts, including peaceful protesters and university students.

Women's rights

Women continued to face discrimination in law and in practice, including high levels of gender-based violence.

In June, outgoing President Adly Mansour approved a law to combat sexual harassment. Renewed sexual assaults by mobs of men against women in Cairo's Tahrir Square during President al-Sisi's inauguration spurred the new administration to promise action. The authorities announced measures to combat violence against women, including improved policing and public awareness-raising campaigns; however, such measures had not materialized by the end of the year.

Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

Men suspected of having consensual sex with other men, as well as transgender people, faced arrest and prosecution on prostitution and public morality charges under the Law on Debauchery (Law 10 of 1961). The authorities subjected some to forcible anal examinations, which violate the prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment.

Security forces arrested over 30 men in a raid on a Cairo bathhouse in November, and the trial of 26 of the men on charges of "debauchery" began in December.

In a separate case, eight men received three-year prison terms in November for attending an alleged same-sex wedding on a Nile riverboat. An appeals court reduced their prison sentences to one year in December.

Discrimination – religious minorities

The authorities failed to tackle discrimination against religious minorities, including Coptic Christians, Shi'a Muslims and Baha'is. Coptic Christian communities, in particular, reported new sectarian attacks and faced restrictions on building and maintaining their places of worship.

Housing rights – forced evictions

Security forces forcibly evicted thousands of people from their homes in Cairo and Rafah, without informing them in advance or providing them with alternative housing or adequate compensation.^[5]

Refugees' and migrants' rights

The authorities failed to respect the rights of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. In August, they forcibly returned 13 Palestinian refugees to Syria and 180 Syrians to Syria, Lebanon and Turkey. At least six were returned to Gaza in December. Other refugees from Syria faced arbitrary arrest and were unlawfully detained.

Security forces arrested refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants who sought to enter or leave Egypt irregularly, sometimes using excessive force. Criminal groups operating in Sinai also reportedly held refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants captive.

Death penalty

The death penalty was used on an unprecedented scale. The courts imposed death sentences, many in the defendant's absence, after grossly unfair trials. Most of those sentenced were convicted of taking part in violence during political unrest in 2013. They included many members and supporters of the

Muslim Brotherhood. The first executions since 2011 were carried out in June.

A court in El-Minya, Upper Egypt, sentenced 37 defendants to death in April, including at least two children, and a further 183 defendants to death in June after grossly unfair trials arising from attacks on police stations in 2013.^[6] The court had recommended the death penalty for over 1,200 defendants but reversed its decisions after consulting the Grand Mufti, a legal process that must take place under Egyptian law before a court formally hands down its sentence.

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2. Egypt: End military trial of journalists (News story) www.amnesty.org/en/news/egypt-end-military-trial-journalists-2014-02-25

3. 'The walls of the cell were smeared with blood' – third anniversary of Egypt's uprising marred by police brutality (News story) www.amnesty.org/en/news/walls-cell-were-smeared-blood-third-anniversary-egypt-s-uprising-marred-police-brutality-2014-0

4. Egypt: Rampant torture, arbitrary arrests and detentions signal catastrophic decline in human rights one year after ousting of Morsi (NWS 11/125/2014) www.amnesty.org/en/news/egypt-anniversary-morsi-ousting-2014-07-02

5. Egypt: Further information: Evicted families attacked by security forces (MDE 12/011/2014) www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE12/011/2014/en

6. Egypt sentences a further 183 people to death in new purge of political opposition (NWS 11/117/2014) www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/egypt-sentences-further-183-people-death-new-purge-political-opposition-201

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