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HRW – Human Rights Watch

Egypt’s Denial of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Ignoring LGBT Rights Endangers People in Time of COVID-19

The Egyptian (<http://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/egypt>) government is refusing to recognize the existence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, flouting its responsibility to protect the rights of everyone.

On March 12, during its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR), where members of the United Nations Human Rights Council weigh in on countries’ human rights records, Egypt rejected recommendations (<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/43/16>) by several states to end arrests and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, Egypt responded (<http://webtv.un.org/search/egypt-upr-report-consideration-32nd-meeting-43rd-regular-session-human-rights-council/6141014026001/?term=&lan=english&page=3>) that it “does not recognize the terms mentioned in this recommendation,” denying the existence of sexual orientation and gender identity.

This outrageous statement from Egyptian officials comes at a time when the COVID-19 health crisis is threatening (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/16/coronavirus-egypts-prisons-could-spare-disaster-conditional-releases>) already vulnerable groups, including LGBT people detained in Egypt’s prisons on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Bedayaa, a Cairo-based LGBT rights organization, documented (<https://rightsafra.com/2020/03/08/repression-in-egypt-92-lgbtqi-arrests-last-year/>) 92 arrests for alleged same-sex conduct in 2019 under Egypt’s “debauchery” law. According to Bedayaa’s report, 69 percent of those arrested were “picked up randomly on the street,” indicating that Egyptian authorities are discriminating against people based on their gender expression.

Under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s government, since 2013 authorities have waged a campaign of arrests (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/06/egypt-mass-arrests-amid-lgbt-media-blackout>) and prosecution against hundreds of people for their perceived or actual sexual orientation and gender identity. In its 2019 report, the Alliance of Queer Egyptian Organizations (AQEO), comprised of three Egypt-based LGBT rights organizations, noted the government crackdown on LGBT people (<https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=6905&file=CoverPage>) over the last four years, which includes violent assaults, torture (including forced anal

exams (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/12/dignity-debased/forced-anal-examinations-homosexuality-prosecutions>)), arbitrary detention, a denial of the rights to assembly and expression, and discrimination in accessing healthcare, education, employment, and housing.

During the same UPR cycle, Egypt claimed (<http://webtv.un.org/search/egypt-upr-report-consideration-32nd-meeting-43rd-regular-session-human-rights-council/6141014026001/?term=&lan=english&page=3>) that it “upholds human rights without discrimination.” But how can this be true as LGBT rights are human rights?

The African Commission on Human and People’s Rights explicitly calls on (<https://www.achpr.org/sessions/resolutions?id=322>) member states, including Egypt, to protect sexual and gender minorities (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/01/african-commission-tackles-sexual-orientation-gender-identity>) in accordance with the African Charter. The UN Africa Group and others reviewing Egypt at the UPR should take note of the country’s unabashed refusal to acknowledge LGBT rights and press Egypt to live up to UN and African human rights standards by upholding sexual orientation and gender identity issues.

ecoi.net summary:

Appeal to government to recognize existence of LGBT-persons and rights of sexual and gender minorities



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Egypt

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