



Human Rights and Democracy Report 2016 - Egypt

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The human rights situation in Egypt in 2016 saw increased restrictions on civil society, freedom of expression and reports of police abuses.

In 2016, reports of torture, police brutality and enforced disappearance continued. A report released by the Egyptian NGO, the Nadeem Centre, documented 535 individual cases of torture, 123 deaths in detention (of which 21 were due to torture) and 980 cases of enforced disappearance. These figures were compiled from media reports; we are unable to verify them independently.

In 2016, journalists continued to be imprisoned in Egypt, which is the world's third-worst jailer of journalists, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The arrests of journalists, activists, protesters and human rights defenders, as well as the pressure imposed on civil society, continue a worrying trend of restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Restrictions on civil society worsened significantly in 2016. Several human rights defenders and NGOs were banned from travelling and/or had their assets frozen in connection with the ongoing 'Foreign Funding Case' against NGOs. On 29 November 2016, Egypt's Parliament passed a draft NGO law which, if ratified, will significantly restrict NGOs' ability to register, access funding and operate freely. There has been international scrutiny of the draft law, including a joint statement by 60 domestic and international NGOs stating the law would "wipe out independent civil society". The current status of the law remains unclear.

In November, Egypt's President Sisi set up the Detained Youth Committee, an initiative to release youth detained in protest or freedom of expression related cases. The formation of this Committee was welcome. In the same month, 82 individuals received a presidential pardon. This was also welcomed. However, pre-trial detention periods which extend beyond the legal limit continue to be a matter of concern. Local NGO the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights has documented 1,464 cases of pre-trial detention used beyond legal limits. Photo-journalist Mahmoud Abu Zeid was detained in August 2013 and remains in pre-trial detention.

During 2016, the UK Government was active on several fronts in support of human rights in Egypt. The then FCO Minister for the Middle East and Africa, Tobias Ellwood, issued public statements on the restrictions on civil society. His statements included concerns regarding the new draft NGO law which will create obstacles to international support to Egypt, and the ongoing 'Foreign Funding Case'. We have sent representatives of the Embassy in Cairo to observe hearings linked to the Foreign Funding Case. We have raised human rights concerns at ministerial and senior levels, including during Prime Minister Theresa May's meeting with President Sisi in September. The UK also raised human rights concerns through statements at the UN Human Rights Council.

The death of Italian Cambridge University PhD student Giulio Regeni was raised with the Egyptian authorities in London and Cairo, including calling for a full and transparent investigation and full cooperation with the Italian investigators. The Embassy started work on two Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy projects to strengthen accountability and the rule of law and improve documentation

of human rights abuses in Egypt. We are working with the Egyptian authorities to strengthen capacity to counter human trafficking and smuggling and provide protection for vulnerable groups who could become victims of modern slavery. Finally, we worked within the EU to ensure human rights were incorporated into the EU/Egypt partnership priorities.

Following the terrorist attack against El-Botrosiya Church on 11 December 2016, claimed by Daesh, the Prime Minister wrote to the President of Egypt to express her deep condolences. The UK Government has been clear that freedom of religion or belief needs to be protected and that the ability to worship in peace is a vital component of a democratic society. We welcome President Sisi's consistent calls for peaceful coexistence and the Government of Egypt's expression of support for the rights of Christians and for religious tolerance, and we hope to see further progress in tackling the drivers of sectarianism.

During 2017 we will continue to raise our concerns with the Egyptian authorities in public and in private, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora. We will also continue to explore options for programmatic interventions to improve the human rights situation. Our priorities will continue to be detention of political activists, police abuses, and restrictions on civil society.

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