

Egypt

Authorities severely repressed the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. In the lead-up to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) in November, authorities released 895 prisoners held for political reasons but arrested nearly triple that number, including hundreds linked to calls for protests during COP27. Thousands of actual or perceived government critics or opponents remained arbitrarily detained and/or unjustly prosecuted. No adequate investigations were carried out into at least 50 suspicious deaths in custody involving reports of denial of adequate healthcare or torture. Death sentences were handed down after grossly unfair trials and executions were carried out. Sexual and gender-based violence remained prevalent, amid the authorities' failure to adequately prevent and punish it. Authorities repressed workers' right to strike, and failed to protect them from unfair dismissal by companies. Residents of informal settlements were forcibly evicted and detained for protesting against home demolitions. Authorities prosecuted Christians demanding their right to worship and others espousing religious beliefs not sanctioned by the state. Refugees and migrants were arbitrarily detained for irregularly entering or staying in Egypt, and dozens were forcibly returned to their home country.

Background

In October, Egypt reached a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a USD 3 billion loan after it agreed to float the Egyptian pound, amid a deepening financial and economic crisis that had devastating effects on people's economic rights. Nearly a third of June's national budget was allocated to debt repayment, and the budget failed to meet the minimum constitutionally mandated allocation of 3% and 6% of GDP to health and education, respectively.

In April, the president announced a "national dialogue" with the opposition. Egypt's human rights record came under increased international scrutiny during COP27, which took place in Sharm El-Sheikh city in November.

Sporadic attacks by armed groups in North Sinai continued, albeit at a reduced rate compared to previous years. Tribal militias played an increasing role in military operations, successfully uprooting the Province of Sinai armed group, an affiliate of the armed group Islamic State, from several villages around Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed. State media reported dozens of deaths and injuries by explosive devices planted by the armed group. In October, emergency measures granting the defence minister exceptional powers to impose curfews, close schools and evacuate residents in "some areas of the Sinai Peninsula" were extended by six months.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly

Authorities continued to crush all forms of peaceful dissent and stifle civic space.

Security forces arbitrarily arrested at least 11 journalists for their work or critical views. At least 26 journalists remained arbitrarily detained following convictions or pending investigations into accusations of "spreading false news", "misusing social media" and/or "terrorism".

At least 600 news, human rights and other websites remained blocked, according to rights groups.

Authorities arbitrarily detained at least eight human rights defenders, and subjected those at liberty to surveillance, unlawful summoning and coercive questioning.

Fifteen human rights defenders and NGO staff were still subjected to investigation, travel bans and asset freezes in relation to the decade-long criminal investigation into the legitimate work of civil

society organizations known as Case 173. In April, the government required all NGOs to register under the draconian 2019 NGO law by April 2023 or face closure.

Political opponents were also targeted through arbitrary detention, unfair prosecution and other harassment. In May, an emergency court sentenced former presidential candidate and founder of Masr al-Qawia party Abdelmoniem Aboulfotoh, and its deputy head Mohamed al-Kassas, to 15 years and 10 years in prison, respectively, for disseminating “false news”, “membership of a terrorist group” and other bogus charges.

Authorities added 620 people, including detained journalists and opposition politicians, to their “list of terrorists” without due process, effectively banning them from engaging in civic or political work or travelling abroad for five years.

In the lead-up to COP27, security forces arrested hundreds of people in connection with protests planned during the conference. Among them was Abdelsalam Abdelghany, arrested in September at his home in the capital, Cairo, after he supported calls for protests during COP27 on social media. He remained detained pending investigations on charges of “spreading false news” and “joining a terrorist group”.

During COP27, security forces subjected participants to interrogations, surveillance and other forms of harassment, and denied entry to Egypt during COP27 to Italian national Giorgio Caracciolo of the anti-torture group DIGNITY.

On 6 November, British-Egyptian activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, who had been on hunger strike in protest at his arbitrary detention and denial of consular visits since April, also stopped drinking water. On 11 November, he was fed intravenously after he lost consciousness. He remained arbitrarily detained and in poor health at the end of the year.

Arbitrary detention and unfair trials

After the president announced the reactivation of the Presidential Pardons Committee (PPC) in April, authorities ordered the release of 895 people held for political reasons and dozens of others for failure to pay debts.¹ Security forces refused to release at least 33 of them, unlawfully summoned others for questioning and threatened to re-arrest them for speaking out. Activist Sherif al-Rouby was released in May and re-arrested in September after he publicly complained about hardships facing former prisoners. Security forces arbitrarily banned from travelling human rights lawyer Mahinour el-Masry, researcher Ahmed Samir Santawy and others released in 2022.

From the reactivation of the PPC in April to the end of the year, 2,562 suspected critics or opponents of the government were arrested and interrogated by the Supreme State Security Prosecution, while thousands remained detained arbitrarily for exercising their human rights. Lawyer Youssef Mansour remained arbitrarily detained since his arrest in March for criticizing abuses against a client.

Prosecutors and judges routinely renewed the pretrial detention of thousands of people held on unfounded terrorism or security-related charges. A new online system for detention-renewal hearings in Badr 3 prison violated detainees’ right to adequate defence and to challenge the legality of their detention.

Defendants’ rights to a fair trial were routinely flouted, with security forces preventing private meetings with lawyers. Convictions and trials of government opponents and human rights defenders by inherently unfair emergency courts continued despite the lifting of the state of emergency in October 2021.

Enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment

Prosecutors routinely failed to order investigations into complaints of enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment.

Security forces subjected hundreds of detainees to enforced disappearance, some for months. National Security Agency (NSA) officers arrested Abdel Rahman al-Saeed on 23 March at his home after he posted a video on social media criticizing the rising cost of living. He remained forcibly disappeared until 19 April.

Torture remained rampant in prisons, police stations and NSA-run facilities. After videos depicting police abuse at Al-Salam First police station in Cairo were leaked in January, authorities convicted and sentenced 21 men, a woman and a boy to between five years and life in prison and added them to the “list of terrorists”. Authorities did not open impartial and effective investigations into the police abuse.

In the second half of the year, authorities moved hundreds of prisoners held for political reasons from the Tora prison complex south of Cairo to the new Wadi al-Natrun prison complex north of Cairo and Badr prison complex, north-east of Cairo. There and elsewhere conditions were cruel and inhuman, with prisoners reporting overcrowding, poor ventilation, lack of hygiene, and inadequate food, drinking water, fresh air and exercise. Authorities denied prisoners access to adequate healthcare and imposed undue restrictions or barred contact with the outside world, in some cases deliberately to punish dissent. Authorities imposed on all detainees in Badr 3 prison a blanket ban on family and lawyer visits and written correspondence.

Death penalty

The courts, including terrorism-circuits of criminal courts and emergency courts, handed down death sentences after unfair mass trials.

In June, a terrorism-circuit of the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced 10 men to death for “terrorism” and murder after a grossly unfair trial. Many had been forcibly disappeared and tortured, denied access to their lawyers, and held in cruel and inhuman conditions amounting to torture.²

While the rate of executions dropped from previous years, the execution of individuals convicted after grossly unfair trials continued.

Extrajudicial executions and unlawful killings

Four videos, which appeared online between July and August, depicted the apparent extrajudicial execution of three unarmed men in custody by the military and affiliated tribal militias in North Sinai. In one video, a visibly injured young man, possibly under the age of 18, can be seen being questioned before being shot dead by an individual in military fatigues and boots.

Prosecutors failed to carry out independent and effective investigations into the causes and circumstances of at least 50 deaths in custody following reports about denial of adequate healthcare or about torture.

The Public Prosecution closed investigations into the suspicious death in custody of the economist Ayman Hadhoud on 18 April, ignoring evidence that the authorities forcibly disappeared him on 5 February and then subjected him to torture and other ill-treatment, and denied him access to timely and adequate healthcare.³

In July, an Italian court halted the prosecution of Egyptian security officers for the torture and murder of Italian student Giulio Regeni in 2016 amid the refusal of Egyptian authorities to cooperate and disclose the suspects’ locations.

Sexual and gender-based discrimination and violence

Authorities failed to adequately prevent and redress widespread sexual and gender-based violence by state and non-state actors.

Between June and October, four young women were killed by men whose advances they rejected. Police did not act on complaints of harassment lodged by Nayera Ashraf against another student at the University of Mansoura two months before he stabbed her to death.

Authorities prosecuted activists speaking out against sexual violence. In January, the Court of Cassation upheld the conviction against activist Amal Fathy for criticizing the authorities' failure to protect women from sexual harassment, and sentenced her to one year's imprisonment.

In August, an economic court convicted journalist Rasha Azab of "insult" and "defamation" and fined her EGP 10,000 (USD 522) for expressing solidarity online with survivors of sexual violence who published anonymous testimonies accusing film director Islam Azazi of sexual assaults.⁴

Authorities prosecuted women social media influencers for their conduct on social media. At least seven women remained imprisoned on morality-related or other bogus charges.

Authorities continued to target individuals based on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. In April, security forces arrested four men and two transgender women at a mall in Cairo and briefly detained them solely on the grounds of their gender identity and their actual or perceived sexual orientation. They reported being verbally and physically abused. One of the transgender women said she was sexually harassed and forced to strip naked and remove her hijab.

Workers' rights

Authorities arrested workers and trade unionists for staging peaceful strikes and protests or seeking justice, and failed to protect private sector workers from unfair dismissal and other reprisals for seeking better working conditions.

In February, security forces used police dogs and tear gas to disperse a peaceful sit-in by thousands of workers at the Universal Group for Home Appliances, a private company, and briefly detained three workers. The Ministry of Manpower failed to address the unfair dismissals of at least 65 workers in May for their involvement in the strike.

Trade unionist Shady Mohamed was detained in October pending investigations on the charge of "joining a terrorist group". Prior to his arrest, he had filed a lawsuit against his former employer challenging his unfair dismissal.

In February, the upper house of parliament approved a draft labour law that facilitates unfair dismissals without adequate compensation.

Authorities failed to act against private companies that did not comply with the minimum monthly wage after it came into force in July.

Right to housing

The authorities continued to carry out forced evictions in informal settlements and arbitrarily arrested dozens of people for protesting against demolition of their homes.

In August, security forces used unlawful force against residents of Warraq Island protesting against plans to evict them and transform the island into a commercial centre. Security forces used tear gas,

beat protesters with batons, and briefly detained dozens. Subsequently, security forces harassed residents at checkpoints and suspended hospital and other services, in what residents saw as attempts to drive them out.

Failure to tackle climate crisis and environmental degradation

In June, Egypt issued an updated NDC, with targets to cut emissions by 33%, 65% and 7% in the electricity, oil and gas, and transport sectors, respectively, from business-as-usual projections by 2030. Experts pointed to concerns over the lack of transparency in the NDC, failure to include an overall emissions target and clear baselines, and the conditioning of modest targets on international financial support. Experts deemed the pledges to be highly insufficient to keep the rise of global temperatures below 1.5°C.

Also in June, Egypt authorized Rosatom, the Russian state-owned nuclear energy corporation, to build a nuclear plant in Dabaa town, Matrouh governorate. Egypt's National Climate Change Strategy cited nuclear energy as an alternative source to fossil fuels despite its harmful environmental impact and its high financial cost relative to natural gas plants, wind farms or photovoltaic solar plants of the same capacity, according to analysis by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), a human rights NGO.

Freedom of religion and belief

Authorities continued to discriminate against Christians in law and practice, and prosecuted Christians demanding their right to worship.

The right to build or repair churches remained restricted by a 2016 law requiring approval from security agencies and other state bodies. According to the EIPR, only 45% of applicants had been granted preliminary approval to build or repair churches since the enactment of the law.

In January, security forces arbitrarily arrested nine residents of Ezbet Farag Allah village in el-Minya governorate and detained them for three months pending investigation over accusations of “participating in a gathering” and “committing a terrorist act” for peacefully protesting against the authorities’ refusal to rebuild the only church in their village.⁵ The nine were released without trial.

Members of religious minorities, atheists and others not espousing state-sanctioned religious beliefs were prosecuted and imprisoned on “defamation of religion” and other bogus charges. On 10 February, the Court of Cassation upheld the three-year prison sentence against blogger Anas Hassan who was arrested in 2019 for running the “Egyptian Atheists” Facebook page.

Refugees’ and migrants’ rights

Authorities continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain refugees and migrants for irregularly entering or staying in Egypt.

In March, authorities forcibly returned 31 Eritrean nationals to Eritrea, including women and children, following prolonged arbitrary detention in harsh conditions without allowing them to challenge their detention or access asylum procedures.⁶
