

World Report 2023



Egypt

Events of 2022

Sanaa Seif, sister of jailed Egyptian-British activist Alaa Abdel-Fattah, who went on a full hunger and water strike with the start of COP27 protesting his unjust imprisonment, takes part in the COP27 Coalition march during the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference COP27.

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September 2022 marked one year since the Egyptian government launched the [national human rights strategy](#), but authorities took few if any steps to ease the wholesale campaign of repression against critics or repeal any of the numerous laws that are routinely used to curtail basic freedoms. While authorities released hundreds of detainees in a piecemeal manner, they arrested many others and re-arrested some of those released. Thousands remain unjustly detained for their peaceful activism.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi declared 2022 the “year of civil society,” but key members of civil society continued to face arbitrary travel bans, asset freezes, and criminal investigations in retaliation for their peaceful activism or criticism.

Egypt faced an intensifying economic crisis in 2022, which increasingly impacted access to food and other socioeconomic rights, while the government negotiated yet another loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

Abuses by Police and Security Forces

Interior Ministry police and National Security agents continued to forcibly disappear opponents in unofficial detention places where detainees are subjected to [torture](#) and forced confessions.

On January 12, security forces [disappeared](#) Hossam Menoufy, a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, after a plane carrying him from Khartoum to Istanbul made an unscheduled landing in Luxor. Although Egypt's Interior Ministry said in a January 15 statement that Menoufy was detained and under investigation, authorities refused to respond to questions about his whereabouts.

Authorities failed to investigate incidents of torture and mistreatment, which remained widespread. In May 2022, Egypt's Supreme State Security head prosecutor, Khaled Diaa, [referred](#) for mass trial a group of detainees who had appeared in two leaked videos, published by the [Guardian](#), showing them in a Cairo police station with wounds that appeared to be the result of torture. The alleged police perpetrators faced no serious investigation.

On April 10, police informed economist Ayman Hadhoud's family that he had [died](#) in custody after being forcibly disappeared in February 2022. Egyptian authorities [failed](#) to conduct an independent, effective, and transparent investigation into Hadhoud's suspicious death in custody and ignored mounting evidence that the authorities forcibly disappeared, tortured, and otherwise ill-treated him, and denied him access to timely and adequate health care.

War in North Sinai

In April, President al-Sisi [indicated in a public speech](#) that the ongoing military operations in North Sinai, involving mainly the army against the local extremist armed group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) affiliate Wilayat Sina, were drawing to a close, stating, "The issue has ended."

But in July and August, videos and photographs circulated on social media by groups representing army-affiliated militias showed three [extrajudicial executions](#) of shackled or wounded men in custody in North Sinai. A Human Rights Watch analysis of these videos verified their authenticity. The analysis indicated that members of both the militias and the army itself were responsible for the killings.

According to [media](#) and [human rights reports](#), army-affiliated militias comprised of members of local clans trained and supported by the army were increasingly involved in fighting in North Sinai in 2022.

The government [allowed some families](#) to return to their lands in late 2021 and early 2022. The Egyptian army has led a [massive demolitions campaign](#) that included destroying over 12,300 buildings from 2013 to July 2020 without upholding its human rights obligations on forced evictions. Many of these demolitions lacked evidence of "absolute" military necessity, likely making them war crimes. Hundreds of families remain uncompensated.

Prison Conditions and Deaths in Custody

The dire conditions in Egyptian prisons and detention centers remained shielded from independent oversight or monitoring in 2022, despite government public relations campaigns touting the opening of new prisons.

In February, prison officials [refused](#) multiple requests by prominent dissident Salah Soltan to see an independent doctor and to obtain the necessary medication and medical equipment. Authorities' denial of health care and other ill-treatment appears to be in retaliation for his son Mohamed's advocacy in the US. In September, Soltan was moved from the notorious Scorpion prison to the new Badr Complex in eastern Cairo. He told his family that authorities continued to hold him in solitary confinement and that an officer told him he would only leave prison as a "dead body." Like

many other inmates of Badr prison, he is exposed to fluorescent lights 24 hours a day and has CCTV surveillance cameras inside his cell.

Authorities continued to deny unjustly detained Egyptian-British blogger and political activist Alaa Abdel Fattah consular access and visits by his [lawyer](#). Abdel Fattah ended his [hunger strike](#) in mid-November.

According to a joint report released in April by the Egyptian Front for Human Rights and the Freedom Initiative, Egyptian security forces and prison staff were found to employ [systematic sexual violence](#) to degrade and torture detainees including men, women, transmen, and transwomen.

At National Security Agency sites, detainees, who are usually victims of enforced disappearances, could be raped, molested, electrocuted on their genitals, or threatened with sexual violence against them or their relatives to coerce confessions. Female prisoners were particularly subject to sexual violence in prisons, where guards would often assault them while carrying out “cavity searches.”

Denial of Fair Trials, Due Process

In February 2022, the president confirmed prison sentences imposed on activist Alaa Abd al Fattah, Mohamed al-Baqer, a human rights lawyer, and Mohamed “Oxygen” Ibrahim, a blogger. The decisions were handed down by [extraordinary Emergency State Security Courts](#) and are not subject to appeal.

Judges and prosecutors routinely remanded thousands of detainees in custody without presenting evidence. Three Egyptian activists began hunger strikes on February 10 and 11, 2022, to protest their [indefinite pretrial detention](#). When judges issued release orders for the three, prosecutors “recycled” them to different cases to circumvent the two-year limit on pretrial detention in Egyptian law.

Freedom of Association, Attacks on Human Rights Defenders

President al-Sisi has called for a national dialogue with elements of the country’s political opposition in May for the first time since he assumed power in 2014. However, the dialogue at time of writing had produced no concrete policies to improve in the human rights situation in Egypt.

Authorities continued to use [arbitrary travel bans](#) to target key members of civil society for their peaceful work, including rights lawyers, journalists, feminists, and researchers. The virtually indefinite bans, which authorities usually do not formally announce and provide no clear way to challenge them in court, have separated families, damaged careers, and harmed the mental health of those subjected to them. Some of those civil society members faced asset freezes that have locked them out of the banking system.

In January 2022, The Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), one of Egypt’s leading independent human rights organizations, announced that it was ending operations after nearly 18 years. The group was forced to close due to a series of [threats, violent attacks, and arrests](#) by the National Security Agency, as well as the looming deadline requiring all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register under the [draconian associations law](#).

Authorities worked to utilize the hosting of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) to whitewash the country’s human rights abuses, even though the government has imposed arbitrary [funding, research, and registration obstacles](#) that have debilitated local environmental groups, forcing some activists into exile and others to steer clear of important work.

As a result, environmental groups' ability to carry out independent policy, advocacy, and field work was largely restricted. They are barred from studying the impact on local communities and the environmental toll of fossil fuel operations. They are also barred from determining the impact of Egypt's vast and opaque military business activity, such as destructive forms of quarrying, water bottling plants, and some cement factories, as well as "national" infrastructure projects (such as a new administrative capital) associated with the president's office or the military.

Freedom of Expression and Assembly

In April 2022, authorities arrested TV presenter [Hala Fahmy](#) and journalist [Safaa al-Korbagy](#) apparently in response to their criticism of the National Broadcasting Authority. Both remained in pretrial detention at time of writing.

On March 28, a court [sentenced](#) two singers to a year in prison and fines on vague charges of "violating family values in Egyptian society and profiting from a video including dancing and singing." The charges stemmed from an October 2020 [video](#) showing the two men singing and dancing along with a female Brazilian belly dancer.

In September, prosecutors summoned three [Mada Masr](#) journalists, as well as the chief editor, and charged them with "spreading false news" over a news article about the Nation's Future Party, the pro-government party that holds a majority in parliament. The chief editor was also charged with operating unlicensed news site.

Authorities continued to block access to hundreds of news and human rights websites without judicial orders.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

During 2022, Egyptian authorities and security forces subjected refugees and asylum seekers to arbitrary detention, physical abuse, and refoulement—forced returns to a country where individuals may face threats to their lives or freedom, torture, or other serious harm. Egypt is a party to the 1951 UN and 1969 African (OAU) refugee conventions and the 1984 Convention against Torture, which prohibit refoulement.

In December 2021 and January 2022, Egyptian police arbitrarily [detained](#) at least 30 Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers during raids, subjecting some to forced physical labor and beatings. [Detained](#) refugees and asylum seekers were kept in overcrowded rooms and denied adequate food and medical care.

In March, authorities deported 31 Eritreans, including 8 children, after detaining them in poor conditions and denying them access to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to lodge asylum claims, according to [the Refugees Platform in Egypt](#). These summary deportations of Eritrean asylum seekers, which followed similar prior deportations [during late 2021](#), violated the international legal prohibition on refoulement.

Women's Rights, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation

In 2022, Egypt witnessed a spate of heinous killings of women by men including a judge who killed his second wife and mutilated her body before secretly burying her, and a male student who [stabbed to death](#) a female fellow student in front of Mansoura University when she refused his marriage proposal. The government has failed for years to enact laws and policies to seriously address violence against women.

Sexual violence remains a pervasive problem in Cairo and other cities. Refugees and asylum seekers, particularly black Africans, live in vulnerable communities where they face assault and rape and the authorities fail to provide them protection, and impede access to justice as police refuse to register survivors' complaints or pursue investigations.

In Egypt, married students who are pregnant or are mothers are reportedly only able to continue their [education](#) through homeschooling. Students who become pregnant outside of marriage do not generally receive the same support and encouragement to continue their education at home.

Authorities in Egypt have undermined lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people's right to privacy with digital targeting, namely entrapment on social media and dating applications, online harassment and "outing," online extortion, monitoring social media, and reliance on illegitimately obtained digital evidence in prosecutions.

Human Rights Watch documented cases where security forces have used digital targeting, based on "debauchery" provisions and the Cybercrime Law, to entrap LGBT people, arbitrarily arrest and detain them based on digital evidence found on their personal devices, and ill-treat them in police custody.

Social and Economic Rights

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine [had serious impacts](#) on the already-deteriorating economic situation in Egypt, where nearly one-third of the population lives under the [national poverty line](#). Egypt is among the world's largest importers of wheat, 80 percent of which comes from Russia and Ukraine. Egypt also imports over half of its sunflower oil from Ukraine, and the government had already reduced subsidies for sunflower and soybean oil by 20 percent in June 2021 in response to an increase in prices. Trade disruptions caused by the war have increased prices for these basic commodities, [limiting access](#) to food for the nation's poorest and most vulnerable populations.

In March, Egyptian authorities requested support from the International Monetary Fund to help mitigate the economic fallout related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. After months of negotiations, a six-month, US\$3 billion program was announced in October. Rights groups have voiced strong concerns in previous years around the lack of emphasis on the need for the Egyptian government to [expand](#) social protection, strengthen judicial independence, and address corruption and the need for transparency.

Key International Actors

On September 15, the [United States](#) withheld US\$130 million of \$300 million in Fiscal Year 2021 Foreign Military Financing to Egypt that was conditioned on human rights progress, out of a total of \$1.3 billion in annual US security assistance. Congress withheld an additional \$75 million in October.

The [European Union](#) presented a joint bid with Egypt in early 2022 to co-lead the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), a multilateral platform with far-reaching influence on global counterterrorism policy, despite Egypt's abhorrent record of human rights violations in the name of counterterrorism. In April 2022, GCTF [approved](#) the chairmanship of Egypt and the EU of the forum.

In August, the European Commission [confirmed](#) that the EU planned to allocate €80 million (around \$82.3 million) in 2022 and 2023 to provide equipment and services to Egyptian authorities "in support of border management," including "search and rescue and border surveillance at land and sea borders," [despite](#) the country's dire human rights record and the impact the EU funding would have in impeding Egyptians' right to leave.

Many European countries such as [France](#) and [Italy](#) continued to export weapons to Egypt, despite the [country's rights record](#).

In February, President al-Sisi attended the EU-AU summit in Brussels, receiving little if any public [criticism](#) by [European leaders](#). In June, the EU and Egypt endorsed their [2021-27 partnership priorities](#) at the bilateral [Association Council meeting](#). The document refers to an allegedly “shared commitment to the universal values of democracy, the rule of law and the respect of human rights,” but fails to acknowledge the deep human rights crisis in Egypt. In November, the European Parliament adopted a damning [resolution](#) on human rights in Egypt reiterating its call for a “profound and comprehensive review” of the EU’s relations with the country.

In September, two NGOs filed complaints in France urging judicial authorities to investigate France’s alleged involvement in a secret Egyptian military operation on the Libyan border on the basis that it involved acts amounting to crimes against humanity.