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HRW – Human Rights Watch (Author)

World Report 2025 - Egypt

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government entered its second decade in power by continuing wholesale repression, systematically detaining and punishing peaceful critics and activists and effectively criminalizing peaceful dissent. Authorities detained and prosecuted dozens of protesters and activists, including at Palestine solidarity demonstrations. Thousands of detainees remained locked up in dire conditions in lengthy pretrial detention or on sentences stemming from unjust trials.

Several leading human rights defenders were allowed to travel outside Egypt for the first time since 2016. However, civic space remained severely curtailed as independent organizations operating under draconian laws faced continued judicial and security harassment. Since January, Egypt signed bailout deals of about US\$57 billion, yet the economic crisis, and the government's response, hampered people's economic and social rights, including to food, health, and electricity.

Conduct of Security Forces

Interior Ministry police and National Security Agency (NSA) officers continued to arbitrarily detain, forcibly disappear, and torture critics and dissidents in official and unofficial places of detention.

In July, NSA officers [arbitrarily detained](#) political satire artist Ashraf Omar and journalist Khaled Mamdouh and held them incommunicado. Omar's family said that NSA agents tortured him and threatened to subject him to electric shocks while in secret detention.

Egyptian authorities appear to have made [opaque amnesty deals](#) in recent years with suspected members of the Islamic State (also known as

ISIS) affiliate in Egypt's North Sinai, without making the criteria public. International laws of war encourage the broadest possible amnesties at the end of non-international armed conflicts; however, this excludes anyone suspected, accused, or convicted of committing war crimes or other serious international crimes. Authorities have not clarified whether they have a plan for prosecuting those suspected of serious abuses such as mass civilian killings and extrajudicial executions.

Despite a relatively calm situation, authorities have continued to treat the North Sinai region as a de facto closed military zone and have prohibited independent reporting. The military [continued to prevent](#) tens of thousands of residents, whom it has forcibly [evicted](#) since 2013, from returning to their land.

Military Jurisdiction

In January, parliament swiftly approved new [government-proposed laws](#) which granted the military sweeping new authority to fully or partially replace functions of the police, civilian judiciary, and other civilian authorities, and to further expand the jurisdiction of military courts to prosecute civilians.

Law No. 3 of 2024 provides military personnel involved in certain operations with the same judicial powers of arrest and seizure as the police. It also stipulates that all offenses against or in relation to broadly worded "vital" public facilities and buildings are to be prosecuted in military courts. In recent years, abusive laws have been used to prosecute [thousands of civilians](#), including children, in military courts.

Freedom of Expression and Assembly

Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), an abusive branch of Egypt's public prosecution, is responsible for keeping thousands of peaceful activists and journalists in pretrial detention for months or years without evidence of wrongdoing. It has [detained](#) many journalists on spurious charges often related to their work. For example, prosecutors held satirist Ashraf Omar and journalist Khaled Mamdouh in pretrial detention since July without evidence of wrongdoing. Lawyers said they faced charges of "spreading false information," "belonging to a terrorist group," and "misusing social media."

In early July, the SSSP arbitrarily [referred](#) Abdelrahman Mahmoud Abdou, a researcher and journalist also known as Abdelrahman Ayyash, to a criminal court. The indictment charged Ayyash alongside four others with "leadership of a terrorist group," while 41 others were charged with joining or financing the unnamed group. Ayyash, who is living in exile, said he did not receive formal notice of the charges.

On July 16, the Interior Ministry [said it detained](#) a man it claimed was responsible for [displaying criticism of President Sisi](#) on a billboard screen in Giza, which went viral on social media. Such criticism is protected free expression that should not be penalized.

In July, authorities arbitrarily [detained](#) more than 100 individuals amid online calls for protests in response to price hikes and power cuts. The protests did not materialize, and authorities preemptively detained people based on online posts. Authorities have also continued to [renew the pretrial detention of protesters](#) including those detained in Palestine solidarity protests in 2023.

Attacks on Human Rights Defenders and Freedom of Association

Authorities allowed prominent human rights defenders, such as Gamal Eid, Hossam Bahgat, and others, to travel abroad for the first time since 2016, when they were [prosecuted](#) alongside dozens of other human rights advocates and organizations in [Case 173](#) known as the “foreign funding” case. In March, [an investigative judge said](#) that the investigations were closed and charges dropped for lack of evidence. In November, [the judge](#) also lifted eight-year-long asset freeze orders imposed on at least four prominent defenders. However, several of the former defendants still face harsh consequences including asset freezes. Nasser Amin and Hoda Abdelwahab, two prominent human rights defenders, remain [arbitrarily banned from](#) traveling abroad and continue to face SSSP investigations.

Independent organizations and advocacy work remain [severely curtailed](#) under the draconian restrictions of Egypt’s [2019 NGO law](#). Prominent activists [prosecuted](#) in other arbitrary cases, such as Gasser Abdelrazek, continue to face travel [bans and asset freezes without trial](#).

In mid-February 2024, several government and progovernment figures and entities engaged in [an aggressive smear campaign](#) on television, in newspapers, and social media against the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, an independent group, and its director Ahmed Salem. Salem, a United Kingdom-based Egyptian human rights activist, said that he received threats through intermediaries close to Egyptian authorities that he “would be brought back to Egypt” if he did not drop his work. One of these threats, through a government-appointed Sinai local clan leader, warned that Salem “is not far from reach even abroad.”

Authorities continued to [detain](#) prominent critic and blogger Alaa Abdelfattah, who was unjustly [sentenced](#) to a five-year term that should have [ended](#) in October 2024. His [lawyer said](#) authorities refused to count the two years Abdelfattah spent in pretrial detention before the verdict,

and plan to detain him until January 2027. He was previously [sentenced](#) in 2015 to a separate five-year term for participating in protests.

Authorities also continued to detain lawyer [Houda Abdel Moneim](#), a former member of the National Council for Human Rights, despite her having served an unjust five-year sentence in October 2023. Instead of releasing her, the [SSSP brought charges](#) against her in a new case almost identical to the previous one against her, connected to the peaceful work of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms. This practice known as “recycling” or “rotation” is extensively used to keep critics in detention.

Government Opposition

In February, an Egyptian court [sentenced](#) prominent politician Ahmed Tantawy, along with his campaign advisor and 21 of his detained supporters, to a year in prison for alleged offenses associated with his presidential challenge to President Sisi in the December 2023 election. The court also barred Tantawy from running for national elections for five years. The court ruling was entirely based on Tantawy's peaceful political activism and the efforts of Tantawy's campaign to collect support statements ahead of the election.

On May 27, authorities [imprisoned](#) Tantawy after an appeals court upheld the one-year sentence against him and nearly two dozen of his supporters and confirmed the ban on running in national elections.

Justice System

Authorities continued to use abusive video conference systems to conduct remote hearings for pretrial detention renewal, without bringing detainees before a judge. This system severely [undermines](#) due process, preventing a judge from assessing the legality and conditions of detention as well as the detainees' wellbeing. And it violates several fair trial guarantees including the right to legal counsel.

Parliament's Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Sub-Committee approved a draft law that would replace the 1950 Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), which would [undermine](#) already weakened fair trial rights and further empower abusive officials. The legislation fails to address Egyptian authorities' widespread use of arbitrary pre-trial detention and enforced disappearance, perpetuates impunity for law enforcement officials who violate human rights, and extends the powers of public prosecutors and law enforcement officers in a manner that could facilitate further violations of defendants' rights. It also expands the use of video conference systems to conduct remote hearings to involve all types of pretrial and trial hearings.

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

The government's economic approach, which prioritizes spending on large infrastructure projects including those led by the military, continues to [undermine](#) people's economic, social and cultural rights, particularly in light of the country's recurring economic crises, including skyrocketing prices of basic commodities, rising poverty, and reduced access to food and electricity.

From February 2024 onwards, [Egypt's donors including](#) the United Arab Emirates, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the United Kingdom and the European Union provided or pledged some US\$57 billion in grants and loans. But this did little to help people in a country where nearly two-thirds of the population of over 100 million live in or near poverty, and the social security system provides only small cash transfers to [around 21 million people](#).

Reforms undertaken in the context of different IMF programs also contributed to an increase in prices and a decrease in the value of cash assistance. Following Egypt's [first IMF program](#) in 2016, the national poverty rate [reached](#) almost 30 percent in 2019 and average consumer inflation [reached](#) 33.3 percent in 2024, [undermining](#) the right to food and an adequate standard of living. Egyptians [faced](#) rolling electricity blackouts this year amid an energy crisis. And the government has [removed](#) many food and fuel subsidies without sufficient measures to scale up the country's social security system and mitigate the harm. Its spending levels on social protection, [health, and education](#) remain inadequate.

Refugee and Migrant Rights

As of November 2024, Egypt [hosted](#) over 841,922 registered refugees and asylum seekers from 659 countries, [including](#) some 565,000 people who fled the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan since April 2023. According to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, the Egyptian government [said](#) it had received 1.2 million Sudanese people since April 2023, which may include unregistered asylum seekers and others who left Egypt to other countries. Between late 2023 and March 2024, Egyptian authorities arbitrarily arrested and unlawfully expelled thousands of Sudanese asylum seekers despite the risks of serious harm in Sudan, violating the principle of non-refoulement, according to reports by [Amnesty International](#) and [others](#). According to UNHCR, access to public schools for refugee children "on equal footing to Egyptians" is [only](#) available to nationals of Sudan, South Sudan, Yemen, and Syria. However, even children of those nationalities face bureaucratic and other hurdles that [deny](#) them access to education.

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