



## Human Rights and Democracy Report - Country Case Study: Egypt

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In 2014, the Egyptian government completed two of the three steps in its road map for political transition. These were a referendum to adopt a new constitution in January, and presidential elections in May. But the human rights situation in Egypt remained poor and deteriorated in some areas, particularly with regards to freedom of expression and association. This had an impact on the political context in which the elections were held. The 2014 constitution enshrines a wide range of human rights, but these protections were not implemented in full. Although the number of deaths of non-violent citizens resulting from security force action reduced in 2014 from the very large numbers in 2013, deaths during the policing of demonstrations and in custody remain a serious concern.

Egypt continued to confront a growing terrorist insurgency. The number of terrorist attacks rose, with members of the security forces the primary target. The Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, and other ministers consistently condemned the terrorist violence in Egypt and the extremism which supported it.

There were increased restrictions on freedom of expression. Reporters without Borders ranked Egypt 159th for press freedoms out of 180 countries. Ministers continued to raise concerns, including the Al Jazeera case. In June, six journalists were sentenced to between seven and ten years' imprisonment. Two of the three journalists tried in absentia were British. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 12 other journalists were also held in prison on politically motivated charges.

Freedom of assembly remained an area of concern, and the UK government continued to press for a revision of the Protest Law. This law requires police authorisation for demonstrations, and provides for significant prison sentences against opposition activists participating in peaceful protests, including the former leader of the April 6 Movement, Ahmed Maher.

The UK remained concerned at restrictions on freedom of association and at the cumulative pressure against political opposition and dissent. In the run-up to the referendum on the constitution, opposition political activists were arrested while campaigning for a "No" vote. Amnesty International estimated that up to 40,000 people have been arrested since July 2013, in the context of demonstrations or opposition political activities. In September 2014, Prime Minister

David Cameron raised with President Al-Sisi concerns about the number of people in pre-trial detention.

Civil society groups complained of harassment and intimidation from state authorities. They were concerned at the implications of a deadline for all NGOs to register with the Ministry of Social Solidarity in November. After consultation with civil society, the government decided to postpone introducing a new NGO law until the new parliament was formed. We called on the Egyptian government to ensure the law reflects the constitution's guarantee of civil society freedom. FCO ministers discussed the situation for civil society with the Egyptian Minister for Social Solidarity during her visit to London in November.

Since the election of President Al-Sisi, there has been new government impetus, promoted by the President himself, to tackle the endemic problem of sexual violence in Egypt. Several convictions followed the new sexual harassment law, passed by Interim President, Adly Mansur. In spite of this, the protection of women's rights in Egypt continues to be a concern.

The new Egyptian government has been clear about its intent to protect religious freedoms. The Coptic Christian community has reported improvements in the protection of religious minorities.

The National Council for Human Rights reported that violence and torture was used in detention. An Egyptian rights group, Wikithawra, estimated that approximately 80 people had died in detention between late 2013 and early 2014. After a de facto moratorium since 2010, 11 prisoners were executed in Egypt in June 2014. Over 1,200 people were sentenced to death in 2014, many in absentia, but most of these sentences were later commuted to life sentences.

On 5 November, Egypt underwent its second review under the UN Human Rights Council's (HRC) Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UK recommended full implementation of the Egyptian government's provisions for the free operation of civil society and completion of the National Strategy on Violence Against Women.

We also used the UPR to invite the Egyptian government to address human trafficking, the opening of an OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) regional office in Cairo, and reports of mistreatment in detention.

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