



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Egypt – July to December 2023

31 December 2023

24 July 2023

President pardons two imprisoned human rights activists

State media reported that President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi pardoned activist Patrick Zaki on 19.07.23, shortly after a court had sentenced Zaki to three years in prison for spreading false news. The activist, who studied at an Italian university, had been arrested during a family visit in February 2020 and charged with spreading false news in connection with an article about everyday discrimination against Christian believers in Egypt he had published in 2019. In December 2021, the authorities provisionally released Zaki from pre-trial detention but imposed a travel ban on him; the court had adjourned his trial several times since then.

Human rights lawyer Mohamed al-Baquer was pardoned as well. The authorities had arrested the lawyer in 2019 while he was representing his client, the recently imprisoned activist Alaa Abd al-Fattah, during an interrogation. In December 2021, an emergency court had sentenced al-Baquer to four years in prison for spreading false news and membership of a terrorist organisation.

07 August 2023

Shooting at security facility in El-Arish leaves several dead and injured

On 30.07.23, four police officers were reportedly killed and another six injured in a shoot-out at a state security facility in El-Arish in the Sinai Peninsula. According to media reports, an unknown number of inmates had obtained weapons which led to clashes with security forces. An unknown number of armed prisoners were also killed in the shoot-out, the media said.

21 August 2023

Activist and other detainees pardoned

According to state media, on 19.08.23 the authorities released activist Ahmed Duma and an unknown number of other detainees following a presidential pardon.

The activist had been a leading figure in the 2011 protests against long-time president Hosni Mubarak. Duma was arrested in 2013 and initially sentenced to 25 years in prison for sedition and assaulting security forces in 2015; in 2019 his sentence was reduced to 15 years and he was fined EGP 6 million.

28 August 2023

Publisher and activist arrested for libel

On 21.08.23, the authorities arrested the publisher and political activist Hisahm Kassem for insulting and abusing state officials, according to media reports.

Kassem is a co-founder of the political group al-Tayar al-Hurr, formed in June 2023. The group plans to support an opposition candidate to run against the current president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, in the upcoming presidential elections next year. Al-Sisi is expected to run again.

Family members of dissidents living abroad arrested

Numerous media report the arrest of the father of the exiled journalist and human rights activist Ahmed Gamal Siada, Gamal Abdelhamid Siada by the security authorities on 22.08.23. Siada is accused of abusing social media, spreading false news and membership in an outlawed association.

According to media reports, also Alaa Eladly was arrested by the security authorities when entering the country at Cairo airport on 18.08.23. He is the father of Fagr Eladly, a German-Egyptian doctor living in Germany, who harshly criticised incumbent President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi at a press conference in Germany in 2015.

International human rights organisations as well as the affected families suspect that the authorities intend to intimidate and exert pressure on Ahmed Gamal Siada and Fagr Eladly by arresting Siada and Eladly. Family members of government critics living abroad have been regularly subjected to harassment, even arrests, by the Egyptian authorities in the past as well.

11 September 2023

Warning of population growth - action called for

As reported by various media, President al-Sisi called for measures against population growth in the country at the first Global Congress on Population, Health and Development on 05.09.23. He said that otherwise the state would not be able to maintain services and infrastructure at current levels. As one measure, he proposed China's one-child policy. He thus contradicted a statement by the responsible minister that the issue of children was a free choice.

18 September 2023

Full-face veils banned in schools

On 11.09.23, the government published a new law on school uniforms. It prohibits schoolgirls from covering their faces in state schools and public places. The headscarf will still be allowed if the student herself or a guardian wants it. People's opinions on this in the social media are divided.

Six months in prison for critical journalist

Hisham Kassem, the former editor of the newspaper al-Masry al-Youm and a political activist, was sentenced to six months in prison and a fine of EGP 20,000 (about EUR 607, as of 18.09.23). He is accused of defamation of a former minister.

09 October 2023

Date for presidential elections brought forward, el-Sisi to run again

Following the announcement by the authorities that the forthcoming presidential elections are to take place on 10.12. to 12.12.23 rather than the originally planned date in the spring of 2024, the incumbent president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, announced on 02.10.23 that he intends to run for a third term in office. According to official information, el-Sisi won the previous presidential elections in 2014 and 2018 with more than 90 % of the vote. International observers claim that these elections were neither free nor fair, however, pointing out that 2018 in particular witnessed intimidation and arrests of other candidates by the security services. While further individuals can apply to run in the forthcoming elections up until 14.10.23, the authorities have reportedly already attempted to prevent opposition candidates, such as Ahmed al-Tantawi, from contesting the elections by subjecting them to intimidation and arresting their supporters.

Protest against current government at rally staged to support el-Sisi's candidature

On 02.10.23, a rally in the town of Mersa Matruh on the north coast of Egypt in support of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's intention to run for the presidency once again reportedly turned into a demonstration against the current government and the prevailing poor living conditions. The demonstrators burned posters of el-Sisi and called for

the government to be brought down. In the wake of the protests, numerous people are said to have been arrested by the security services on 03.10.23.

16 October 2023

Three femicides in the space of several days

According to reports in the media, three women were murdered on 27.09. and 28.09.23. All three cases concerned failed marriages or romantic relationships in which the men killed the women concerned after being rejected by them. In some instances, the murder victims are said to have been subjected to harassment and intimidation by their murderers for several years. Numerous femicides were also reported in 2022. These murders are said to be anything but isolated incidents; rather, harassment and violence towards women are reportedly widespread in Egypt.

Opposition politician withdraws presidential candidature

On 13.10.23 former MP and opposition politician Ahmed Tantawi withdrew his candidacy for the forthcoming presidential elections due to his failure to secure sufficient expressions of support. 25,000 votes of support from the public in 15 governorates or expressions of support from 20 incumbent MPs are required in order to gain accreditation as a presidential candidate; Tantawi received 14,000 expressions of support. According to the national electoral authority, his claims that the authorities had attempted to prevent many people from voting in favour of his candidacy and had made it difficult for him to stage election rallies during the election campaign are unfounded (cf. BN of 09.10.23).

30 October 2023

More than 100 people arrested after pro-Palestinian protests

At least 100 people were reportedly arrested in all on 20.10.23, following pro-Palestinian protests in numerous Egyptian towns and cities, such as Cairo and Alexandria, against Israel's military onslaughts in the Gaza Strip. The protests had been approved beforehand by the government authorities. However, when a number of demonstrators congregated at Tahrir Square, where no protests are permitted, the protests were broken up by the security forces. In the more than 100 arrests over the following week, some protesters were briefly detained, while in other cases the authorities initiated investigations on suspicion of membership of and/or supporting a terrorist organisation. According to a human rights lawyer, supporters of the former MP and opposition politician Ahmed Tantawi were among those detained. Tantawi had attempted to run as a presidential candidate, but failed due to a lack of public support and support from MPs (cf. BN of 16.10.23).

Rocket hits administration building and health facility in town on the Red Sea

On 27.10.23 a rocket reportedly hit an administration building and a medical facility in Taba, a town on the Red Sea close to the Egyptian-Israeli border, injuring at least six people. The Israeli military is said to be aware of this security incident close to its national territory. It remains unclear to date who was responsible for the rocket.

06 November 2023

Independent news portal banned for six months

It has been reported in the media that on 30.10.23 the Supreme Council for Media Regulation had the internet site of independent news portal Mada Masr banned in Egypt for six months and referred the case to the chief public prosecutor for further investigation.

The authorities accuse Mada Masr of pursuing media activities without a valid licence, publishing fake news in the context of the current Israel-Gaza war and consequently endangering national security.

The news portal, which has been endeavouring to obtain a media licence in vain since 2018, published an article on 11.10.23 based on interviews with unspecified high-ranking figures from political and diplomatic circles in which it discussed, among other things, the issue of the possible admission of Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip. Following many reactions in social media, the news portal altered the title of its article on the grounds that it left room for interpretation and was at variance with the actual content of the article.

