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Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2015 - Egypt

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to its constitution, Egypt is a republic governed by an elected president and a unicameral legislature. Domestic and international observers concluded the presidential election that took place in May 2014 was administered professionally and in line with the country's laws, while also expressing serious concerns that government limitations on association, assembly, and expression constrained broad political participation. The constitution granted the president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, legislative authority until the election of the new parliament.

Parliamentary elections occurred in several rounds from October through December, and the new parliament was scheduled to hold its first session on January 10, 2016. Domestic and international observers concluded that government authorities administered the parliamentary elections professionally and in accordance with the country's laws. Observers expressed concern about restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly, association, and expression and their negative effect

on the political climate surrounding the elections. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

The most significant human rights problems were excessive use of force by security forces, deficiencies in due process, and the suppression of civil liberties. Excessive use of force included unlawful killings and torture. Due process problems included the excessive use of preventative custody and pretrial detention, the use of military courts to try civilians, and trials involving hundreds of defendants in which authorities did not present evidence on an individual basis. Civil liberties problems included societal and government restrictions on freedoms of expression and the press, as well as on the freedoms of assembly and association.

Other human rights problems included disappearances; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrests; a judiciary that in some cases appeared to arrive at outcomes not supported by publicly available evidence or that appeared to reflect political motivations; reports of political prisoners and detainees; restrictions on academic freedom; impunity for security forces; harassment of some civil society organizations; limits on religious freedom; official corruption; limits on civil society organizations; violence, harassment, and societal discrimination against women and girls, including female genital mutilation/cutting; child abuse; discrimination against persons with disabilities; trafficking in persons; societal discrimination against religious minorities; discrimination and arrests based on sexual orientation; discrimination against HIV-positive persons; and worker abuse, including child labor.

The government inconsistently punished or prosecuted officials who committed abuses, whether in the security services or elsewhere in government. In most cases either the government did not comprehensively investigate human rights abuses, including most incidents of violence by security forces, or investigations resulted in acquittals, contributing to an environment of impunity.

Attacks by terrorist organizations caused arbitrary and unlawful deprivation of life. Terrorist groups conducted deadly attacks on government, civilian, and security targets throughout the country, including schools, places of worship, and public transportation.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were numerous reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings while making arrests, dispersing demonstrators, or holding persons in custody. There were also reports of civilians killed during military operations in the Sinai. Impunity was a problem.

The government used force, and at times used excessive force, to disperse both peaceful and nonpeaceful demonstrations. According to local media reports, on January 23, security forces shot and killed 17-year-old Sondos Reda Abu Bakr during clashes with Muslim Brotherhood (MB)-affiliated protesters in Alexandria. According to the Ministry of Health, fighting between police and protesters killed 23 persons, including 17 protesters, three “militants,” and three police officers during the fourth anniversary of the January 25 revolution.

On January 24, a Central Security Forces (CSF) officer shot and killed secular activist Shaimaa El Sabbagh as police attempted to disperse a protest in downtown Cairo. The court sentenced the officer to 15 years in prison for manslaughter (see section 1.d.). The officer's attorney appealed the verdict, but by year's end the Court of Cassation had not decided whether to accept the appeal.

Although there were claims that demonstrators sometimes instigated violence, there were no reports of investigations of loss of life during these incidents.

There were instances of persons tortured to death and other allegations of killings in prisons and detention centers. The El Nadim Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence reported 37 deaths due to torture during the year. The government charged, prosecuted, and convicted perpetrators in some cases. On February 22, police arrested Karim Hamdy on charges of participating in an unauthorized protest and possessing weapons. Two days later Hamdy died at Mattareya Police Station. Local media reported the Forensic Medical Authority's report showed Hamdy had been beaten; he suffered 10 broken ribs and bleeding in the brain. The public prosecutor charged two members of the National Security Sector, Omar Hammad and Mohamed al-Anwar Mohamadeen, and on December 12, the court convicted the officers of torture and sentenced each of them to five years in prison. Authorities subjected the trial proceedings to a media restraint order (see sections 1.c. and 1.d.).

There were reports of suspects killed in unclear circumstances during or after arrest. On September 7, authorities arrested Mogahed Hassan Zaki, a 30-year-old doctor and member of the outlawed MB-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), in Cairo, according to MB-affiliated media interviews with his family. Two days later the morgue at a nearby hospital reported Zaki dead as the result of gunshot wounds in the chest and back. The Ministry of Interior claimed police killed Zaki in an exchange of gunfire during an attempted arrest. The Ministry of Interior alleged Zaki was previously involved in killing a police officer in Beni Suef.

There were also reports of suspected terrorists and other suspected criminals killed during security raids conducted by police. In each instance the Ministry of Interior claimed the suspects had been killed after opening fire on police officers. Rights groups claimed these shootings might have amounted to extrajudicial killings. In some of these cases, media reported that family members said there was evidence that police detained and tortured the suspects before killing them. For example, on July 1, police killed at least nine members of the MB during a raid in 6th of October City outside Cairo. The Ministry of Interior stated the raid targeted "fugitive" MB leaders accused or convicted of murder, terrorism, and other violent acts. According to a July 31 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report and local media, family members and other witnesses who viewed the victims' bodies in the morgue stated the bodies exhibited signs of torture and some had ink on their fingers, indicating authorities may have arrested the suspects before killing them.

Rights groups and international media reported the armed forces used indiscriminate force during military operations that targeted widespread terrorist activity in the northern Sinai Peninsula, resulting in killings of civilians and destruction of property, particularly along the border with Gaza, where there was extensive smuggling of weapons and other equipment to terrorist groups. The government has not reported any civilian casualties during operations in the Sinai.

Security forces killed civilians during operations in other parts of the country. On September 13, air force units mistakenly attacked a tourist convoy near the Bahariya oasis in the western desert while

in pursuit of an armed militant group. The attack resulted in the death of 12 persons, including eight Mexican citizens. An investigation continued at year's end.

On November 6, media reported that naval vessels fired on a Palestinian fishing boat operating in international waters near the Egypt-Gaza border, in an area where weapons and other smuggling was frequent, killing a Palestinian fisherman and injuring another.

In March 2014 a court sentenced one police officer to 10 years in prison for manslaughter and three other officers to one-year suspended prison sentences in the 2013 case in which police killed 37 MB detainees in the process of transferring them to Abu Zaabal Prison near Cairo. In June 2014 an appeals court vacated the sentences and returned the case to the public prosecution for reinvestigation. On August 13, the appeals court reduced the officer's sentence from 10 to five years and upheld the one-year suspended prison sentences for the three other officers. A second appeal was pending at year's end.

At year's end the government had not held accountable any individual or governmental body for state violence after June 2013, including the deaths of hundreds of civilians during the August 2013 dispersals of the sit-ins at Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo and Nahda Square in Giza (see section 1.d.).

Terrorist groups, including Da'esh Sinai Province (formerly known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis) and Afnad Misr, among others, conducted deadly attacks on government, civilian, and security targets throughout the country, including schools, places of worship, and public transportation. On June 29, terrorists killed the prosecutor general, Hisham Barakat, with a car bomb that targeted his motorcade in Cairo. According to local media, the attack also injured nine persons, including two drivers and five members of the security forces. On July 11, an improvised explosive device exploded in front of the Italian Consulate in Cairo, resulting in the death of one civilian and the injury of eight civilians. Da'esh Sinai Province claimed responsibility for the attack.

On October 31, Metrojet flight 9268 crashed in the Sinai after departing from Sharm el Sheikh airport killing all 224 individuals on board. Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for the attack; official investigations to determine the cause of the crash continued at year's end.

There was no published official data on the number of victims of terrorist violence during the year. According to local media reports, during the year terrorists killed hundreds of civilians throughout the country. In Sinai alone, militant violence killed at least 260 civilians and 190 security-force members (police and military) violence in the region, according to publicly available information.

b. Disappearance

According to a May 2014 Amnesty International (AI) report, more than 1,000 persons missing since the 2011 revolution were unaccounted for at that time. International and local rights organizations reported new cases during the year. Local activists and rights groups stated hundreds of arrests did not comply with due process laws (for example, authorities did not charge the detainees with crimes or refer them to prosecutors and prevented access to their lawyers and families), and that some cases may amount to forced disappearances. In a July 20 report, HRW stated authorities likely forcibly disappeared dozens of persons, including five documented between April 2014 and June.

For example, on June 1, the family of journalist and activist Esraa El Taweel reported her missing. According to rights organizations, local police originally denied any knowledge of her arrest, but a fellow prisoner later reported seeing her on June 16 at Qanater women's prison at the Tora prison complex outside of Cairo. According to a local rights group, she was in police custody for 13 days before police presented her to the prosecution on June 29. According to the law, police may detain a suspect for up to 24 hours, after which police must present the suspect to the prosecution, which may request a judge to issue an order for continued detention (see section 1.d.). Authorities have not yet filed charges against Taweel. Authorities held her in preventative custody until December 19, when she was ordered released to house arrest due to a medical condition.

There were reports that military authorities continued to hold civilians in secret at al-Azouly Prison inside al-Galaa Military Camp in Ismailia. Authorities did not charge the detainees with crimes or refer them to prosecutors or courts and prevented access to their lawyers and families.

According to an August 10 UN Human Rights Council Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, 124 disappearance cases were under the working group's review, an increase of more than 100 percent from the previous year. By year's end the working group still had not received a response to its 2011 request to visit the country (see section 5).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution states that no torture, intimidation, coercion, or physical or moral harm shall be inflicted upon a person whose movements are restricted or whom authorities have detained or arrested. The penal code forbids torture to induce a confession from a detained or arrested suspect but fails to account for mental or psychological abuse against persons whom authorities have not formally accused, or for abuse occurring for reasons other than securing a confession. The penal code also forbids all public officials or civil servants from "employing cruelty" or "causing bodily harm" under any circumstances. Local rights organizations documented hundreds of incidents of torture throughout the year, including deaths that resulted from torture (see section 1.a.). According to domestic and international human rights organizations, police and prison guards sometimes resorted to torture to extract information from detainees, including minors. Reported techniques included beatings with fists, whips, rifle butts, and other objects; electric shocks; sexual assault; attacks by dogs; and forced standing for hours. Government officials denied the use of torture was systemic. Authorities stated they did not sanction these abuses and, in some cases, prosecuted individual police officers for violating the law (see section 1.a.).

A local rights group reported that authorities detained 14-year-old Akram al-Sawy from September 2014 until January 8, along with his father, whom authorities accused of belonging to the MB. The rights group report described torture and abuse that authorities inflicted on Sawy and other prisoners including being beaten, kicked, and subjected to electric shocks.

On November 25, press reported that 47-year-old Talaat Shebeeb died in Luxor police station hours after police arrested him. The Forensic Medical Authority's report determined that a severe beating had broken the vertebrae in his back and severed his spinal cord. Authorities arrested and charged nine police officers in connection with the death. The trial was pending at year's end.

No information was available about the results of the public prosecutor's investigation into a May 2014 case in which police at the Matariya police station reportedly tortured to death a man they detained after a neighborhood quarrel.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in the prisons and detention centers were harsh and potentially life threatening due to overcrowding, physical abuse, inadequate medical care, poor infrastructure, and poor ventilation.

Physical Conditions: According to domestic and international nongovernmental organization (NGO) observers, prison cells were overcrowded, and prisoners lacked adequate access to medical care, proper sanitation and ventilation, food, and potable water. Tuberculosis was widespread. Provisions for temperature control and lighting generally were inadequate. Reports that guards abused prisoners including juveniles in adult facilities were common. Prison conditions for women were marginally better than those for men. Media reported that some prisoners protested conditions by going on hunger strike, including at Aqrab Prison in December.

The large number of arrests and the use of pretrial detention during the year exacerbated harsh conditions and overcrowding, contributing to the prevalence of death in prisons and detention centers. In June the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) reported that prison populations reached 160 percent of maximum capacity and police station detention centers reached 300 percent of maximum capacity. Health care in prisons was inadequate, leading to a large number of prisoner deaths due to possibly treatable natural causes. Families of some deceased prisoners claimed that prison authorities deprived the prisoners access to potentially life-saving medical care and, in some cases, denied requests to transfer the prisoners to the hospital. Some family members and political groups claimed authorities denied prisoners access to medicine and health care, leading to deaths in prison.

On August 9, Essam Derbala, a senior Islamic Group (IG) leader, died in prison from diabetes and high blood pressure. The Building and Development Party (the political arm of the IG), attributed his death to lack of adequate medical care, including access to medicine to treat known conditions.

There were reports authorities sometimes held prisoners accused of crimes related to political or security issues separately from common criminals and subjected them to verbal or physical abuse and punitive solitary confinement.

Authorities did not always separate juveniles from adults and sometimes held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners. Rights organizations continued to allege the illegal use of CSF camps as detention facilities. In January a local rights group claimed that authorities held at least 600 children between the ages of 14 and 17 at a CSF camp in Banha.

An amendment to the Prison Law issued in October expanded prison officials' authority to use force against prisoners who resisted orders. Previously, use of force was only authorized in cases of self-defense and to prevent an escape.

Administration: The penal code provides for reasonable access to prisoners. There were no reports of authorities using alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders in cases where the penal code provides for a prison sentence for the crime in question. The NCHR considered itself an

ombudsman on behalf of prisoners, but there was no official ombudsman. According to NGO observers and relatives, the government sometimes prevented visitors' access to detainees. Prisoners could request investigation of alleged inhuman conditions. NGO observers claimed, however, that prisoners sometimes were reluctant to do so due to fear of retribution from prison officials. The government investigated some, but not all, of these allegations. As required by law, the public prosecutor continued to inspect prisons and detention centers.

Independent Monitoring: The government did not permit visits by nongovernmental observers but did permit some visits by the quasi-governmental NCHR to prisons and detention centers. The NCHR visited seven prisons during the year, after receiving approval from the Ministry of Interior's Prisons Authority or Prosecutor General. In October amendments to the Prisons Law formally recognized the NCHR's role in monitoring prisons, specifying that visits required notifying the prosecutor general in advance. Authorities did not permit other organizations to conduct prison visits.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, but reported incidences of such practices remained high.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The government maintained effective control over security forces. The primary security forces of the Ministry of Interior are the Public Police and the CSF. The Public Police are responsible for law enforcement nationwide. The CSF provide security for infrastructure and key domestic and foreign officials, and are responsible for crowd control. The National Security Sector (NSS), which investigates counterterrorism and internal security threats, also reports to the minister of interior. The armed forces report to the minister of defense and are generally responsible for external defense, but they also have a mandate to "assist" police in protecting "vital public facilities," including roads, bridges, railroads, power stations, and universities. Military personnel have arrest authority during "periods of significant turmoil." The Border Guards Department is responsible for border control and includes members from the army and police. Single-mission law enforcement agencies, such as the Tourist and Antiquities Police and the Antinarcotics General Administration, also worked throughout the country.

Official impunity was a problem. Police investigative skills remained poor. Police did not investigate reported police abuses sufficiently, according to local and international human rights groups. The government investigated and prosecuted some, but not all, reports of abuse, and many prosecutions resulted in acquittals due to insufficient or contradictory evidence. The government frequently called for investigations or appointed fact-finding committees to investigate abuses by security forces, although these investigations rarely resulted in judicial punishment. Human rights organizations stated that the amended counterterrorism law issued on August 15 could shield security forces from prosecution.

In August a video of two police officers beating a citizen in a metro station circulated on social media. The minister of interior ordered an "internal investigation," but authorities provided no information concerning the results.

On January 24, CSF officer Yassin Mohamed Hatem Salehedin shot and killed secular activist Shaimaa El Sabbagh while she participated in a peaceful march commemorating the 2011 revolution. On June 11, the Cairo Criminal Court convicted the officer of manslaughter and sentenced him to 15 years in prison. The officer's attorney announced his intention to appeal the verdict, but at year's end no information was available on the status of the appeal.

On June 4, the Court of Cassation, citing technical grounds, ordered a retrial in the case against former president Hosni Mubarak, former minister of interior Habib al-Adly, and six others for issuing the order to kill protesters during the 2011 revolution. The retrial began on November 5, and the next hearing was scheduled for January 21, 2016. By year's end authorities had not found any entity or individual responsible for the deaths of protesters during the 2011 revolution.

At the end of the year, the government did not hold accountable any individual or governmental body for violence related to the 2013 change in government, including the death of hundreds of civilians during the 2013 dispersals of the sit-ins at Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahda Squares. Estimates of the number of civilians killed during the Rabaa Square incident ranged from 607, according to a 2014 government fact-finding committee, to more than 1,000 according to a 2014 HRW report. Eight police officers were also killed, according to both reports. A third 2014 report by the quasi-governmental NCHR found that police "sometimes failed to maintain self-restraint and sometimes were not proportional." The government did not announce any actions it would take in response to the NCHR or government fact-finding committee reports.

Three other NCHR reports, announced in 2013, were not completed by year's end: one on attacks on places of worship since June 2013; one on the August 2013 attack on a police station in Kerdasa; and one on the August 2013 Abu Zaabal Prison transfer killings.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

For persons other than those apprehended in the process of committing a crime, the government required a warrant under the penal code or the code of military justice, both of which were in effect simultaneously.

Ordinary criminal courts and misdemeanor courts hear cases brought by the prosecutor general. Criminal defendants have the right to counsel promptly after arrest and usually, but not always, were allowed access to family members. The court is obliged to provide a lawyer to indigent defendants. Nevertheless, defendants often faced administrative, and in some cases political, obstacles and could not secure regular access to lawyers or family visits.

Arrests under the penal code occurred openly and with warrants issued by a public prosecutor or judge. There was a functioning bail system, although some defendants claimed judges imposed unreasonably high bail amounts.

In cases involving crimes against a person, the prosecutor may order four days of provisional detention. A counterterrorism law issued in August extended that period to eight days in terrorism cases. According to the criminal procedure code, the initial period may be up to 15 days in cases involving crimes against national security, such as treason and possession of arms. The code allows indefinite detention of appellants in cases involving the death penalty or life imprisonment.

After the initial period, the prosecutor must submit the case to a judge, who can release the accused person or renew the detention in increments of 15 days (but no longer than 45 days at a time), for up to five months. The case then either must be referred to the felony court for trial or dropped. If the case is referred for trial, the trial court may continue to extend the preventative detention in increments of 15 days (but no longer than 45 days at a time) for up to two years. In cases other than crimes involving the death penalty or life imprisonment, the maximum period for preventative detention is two years. After two years (cumulative) preventative detention without a conviction, the accused person must be released immediately.

Charges involving the death penalty or life imprisonment sometimes could apply to cases related to demonstrations, such as blocking roads or demonstrating outside government buildings; as a result some appellants charged with nonviolent crimes might be held indefinitely, because the government viewed these crimes as security problems.

Arbitrary Arrest: The constitution prohibits arrest, search, or detention without a judicial order, except for those caught in the act of a crime. There were frequent reports of arbitrary arrest and detention. Local activists and rights groups stated that hundreds of arrests did not comply with due-process laws. For example, authorities did not charge the detainees with crimes or refer them to prosecutors and prevented access to their lawyers and families (see section 1.b.).

Pretrial Detention: The government did not provide figures on the total number of pretrial detainees. Rights groups and the quasi-governmental NCHR alleged continued excessive use of pretrial detention and preventative detention during trials for nonviolent crimes. Authorities sometimes held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners. Large backlogs in the criminal courts contributed to protracted periods of pretrial detention. There were unreliable estimates of the number of pretrial detainees. According to a May 31 report by the NCHR citing figures from the Ministry of Interior, at least 7,000 persons remained in pretrial detention on charges related to incidents after June 2013, including approximately 300 “activists.” Most others were affiliated with the MB, according to the NCHR.

Authorities have held photojournalist Mahmoud Abu Zeid (known as Shawkan) in preventative detention since 2013. Authorities arrested him while he was taking pictures during the security forces’ dispersal of the MB sit-in at Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo. Shawkan’s lawyers told AI the prosecutor referred the case to criminal court on August 11, together with 737 other defendants charged with belonging to the MB, possessing firearms, and murder. The court issued a decision to continue his preventative detention during trial, according to his lawyers. The trial was scheduled to begin on February 6, 2016.

According to local and international rights groups, authorities have held 19-year-old Mahmoud Mohamed Hussein in preventative detention in Cairo’s Tora Prison since authorities detained him in January 2014. Authorities arrested then 17-year-old Hussein on a microbus. According to AI, National Security officers used electric shocks to his hands, back, and testicles to elicit a videotaped confession to membership in a banned group, possessing Molotov cocktails and hand grenades, protesting without authorization, and receiving money to protest. The Public Prosecutor’s Office opened an investigation, but no results were available at year’s end. On November 17, a court renewed Hussein’s preventative detention for another 45 days.

Protracted Detention of Rejected Asylum Seekers or Stateless Persons: Authorities detained and sometimes deported without providing access to asylum procedures persons who entered the country illegally or who were present in the country illegally. The navy continued to intercept some boats carrying refugees headed to Europe on grounds of suspicion of “irregular migration.” Authorities arrested more than 2,000 individuals during the year for attempting to depart the country in an irregular manner by sea in Alexandria, Kafr al-Sheikh, and Marsa Matrouh. The authorities released the majority, but some remained in detention without access to asylum procedures or due process (see section 2.d.). Those whom authorities released could obtain and renew Egyptian residency permits, if registered as persons of concern to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Authorities arrested and detained children, including unaccompanied children, without adequate access to food, clothing, sanitation, and health care, according to a local advocacy organization.

Amnesty: The constitution gives the president the power to grant a pardon or reduce a sentence, after consulting with the cabinet. The president used this authority to pardon hundreds of prisoners--generally those who had served the majority of their sentences during the year, including secular activists, student protesters, MB members, and others. Yara Sallam and Sana Seif, secular activists arrested at a demonstration in 2014 and convicted for breaking the demonstrations law, were among those pardoned during the year.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for the independence and immunity of judges. Courts generally acted independently, although individual courts sometimes appeared to lack impartiality and to arrive at politically motivated outcomes. The government generally respected court orders.

There were trials involving hundreds of defendants, particularly in cases involving demonstrators sympathetic to former president Morsy and the MB. Judicial and executive review is available to individuals sentenced to the death penalty.

During the year the Court of Cassation ordered retrials in two cases based in Minya with hundreds of defendants. On January 24, the Court of Cassation ordered a retrial in the case where the Minya court issued a provisional sentence condemning 529 persons to death on charges of killing a police officer and attempting to kill two other police officers. The retrial did not begin by year's end.

On February 11, the Court of Cassation ordered a retrial in the second high-profile Minya trial, in which the Minya criminal court issued provisional death sentences in 2014 to 683 defendants, including MB Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie, on charges of attacking a police station and killing two police officers. The retrial continued, and the next hearing was scheduled for February 7, 2016.

The constitution states: “Citizens cannot stand trial before military courts except for crimes that represent a direct assault against military facilities, military barracks, or whatever falls under their authority; stipulated military or border zones; military equipment, vehicles, weapons, ammunition, documents, military secrets, public funds or military factories; crimes related to conscription; or crimes that represent a direct assault against its officers or personnel because of the performance of their duties.”

Nevertheless, authorities used military courts to try civilians during the year. Public access to information about military trials was limited. Military trials were difficult to monitor because they were usually subjected to media restraint orders. Rights groups and lawyers stated defense attorneys in military trials had difficulty gaining access to their clients and to documentation related to the cases.

One local activist group recorded 160 cases of students referred to military trials, while another local rights group alleged that authorities had referred thousands of civilians to military courts since the issuance of an October 2014 decree ordering the military to “assist” police in securing “vital public facilities.”

On March 19, a military court convicted 15 students from Mansoura University for “possessing fireworks, bladed weapons, inciting leaflets, gasoline, books that contain radical fundamentalist thoughts; protesting without a permit; and threatening the general social well-being.” According to local media, the court issued sentences ranging from two to 10 years’ imprisonment.

On September 3, a military court sentenced six students and a professor from Mansoura University to seven years in prison on charges related to rioting, violence, protesting without a permit, and damaging the university’s administrative building. The court sentenced another female student in the case to two years in prison. Authorities arrested the defendants in October 2014, and the public prosecutor transferred the case to the military court on January 6.

Former president Morsy remained in detention as a defendant in five cases, all of which were in trial proceedings at year’s end, on charges including incitement to murder, murder, fraud, insulting the judiciary, and espionage. Local and international rights groups questioned the impartiality of proceedings. There were reports authorities periodically denied family visit requests for “security reasons.”

Trial Procedures

The law presumes defendants are innocent, and authorities usually inform them promptly and in detail of charges against them. The legal system, based on the conventional European tradition, does not provide for juries. Civilian criminal and misdemeanor trials usually are public. Defendants have the right to consult an attorney, and the government is responsible for providing counsel if the defendant cannot afford a lawyer. The law allows defendants to question witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf, and it provides defendants and their attorneys the right to access government-held evidence. Defendants have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. The constitution provides for the right of an accused person to remain silent in his own trial. In civilian courts defendants have the right of appeal up to the Court of Cassation. In civilian courts the judge must seek the nonbinding review of the Grand Mufti on all death sentences, and the president must confirm all such sentences.

The law permits individual members of the public to file charges with the prosecutor general (PG), who is charged with deciding whether the evidence justifies referring the charges for a trial. Observers reported, however, that, due to unclear evidentiary standards, the PG’s Office investigates and refers for trial the overwhelming majority of such cases, regardless of the strength of the evidence.

Military courts are not open to the public. Defendants in military courts nominally enjoyed the same due process rights, but the military judiciary has wide discretion to curtail these rights in the name of public security. Military courts, however, often tried defendants in a matter of hours, frequently in groups, and sometimes without access to an attorney, leading lawyers and NGOs to assert they did not meet basic standards of due process. Consequently, the quick rulings by military courts sometimes prevented defendants from exercising their rights. Defendants in military courts have the right to consult an attorney, but sometimes authorities denied them timely access to counsel. According to rights groups, authorities permitted defendants in military trials visits from their attorneys every six months, in contrast with the civilian court system, where authorities allowed defendants in detention attorney visits every 15 days.

The Military Judiciary Law governing the military court system grants defendants in the military court system the right to appeal up to the Supreme Military Court of Appeals. The president must certify sentences by military courts.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were reports of political prisoners and detainees, although verifiable estimates were not available. The government claimed there were no political prisoners and all persons in detention had been or were in the process of being, charged with a crime. Human rights groups and international observers maintained the government detained or imprisoned as many as several thousand persons solely or chiefly because of their political beliefs or opposition to the government. A local rights group considered any persons arrested under the 2013 demonstrations law to be political prisoners. In their view these persons were political prisoners or detainees because authorities held them based on laws that restricted the exercise of a human right, because charges were false or inflated motivated by the individual's political opinion or membership in a particular group, or because some individuals faced unduly harsh and disproportionate treatment due to their political opinions or membership in particular groups.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals had access to civil courts for lawsuits relating to human rights violations and filed such lawsuits during the year. Nonetheless, the evidentiary standard and lack of investigatory capacity and will required for a conviction in cases of alleged human rights violations often meant courts dismissed cases or acquitted defendants for lack of evidence or conflicting witness testimonies.

Property Restitution

In response to a continuing insurgency in North Sinai, the government continued its efforts to establish a buffer zone in the region to interdict weapons smuggling and incursions to and from the Gaza Strip. A September 22 HRW report estimated authorities demolished at least 3,255 residential, commercial, administrative, and community buildings between mid-2013 and August, including forcible evictions of thousands of persons. The government promised it would appropriately compensate all families whose homes it razed. Some persons complained they did not receive adequate or timely restitution. According to HRW the government also razed approximately 1,700 acres of cultivated farmland. The government did not compensate residents for agricultural land.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution provides for the privacy of the home, correspondence, telephone calls, and other means of communication. There were reports security agencies sometimes placed political activists, suspected subversives, journalists, foreigners, and writers under surveillance; monitored their private communications; screened their correspondence, including e-mail; examined their bank records; searched their persons and homes without judicial authorization; and confiscated personal property in an extrajudicial manner.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press but includes a clause stating “it may be subject to limited censorship in times of war or public mobilization.”

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Citizens expressed their views on a wide range of political and social topics. The government investigated and prosecuted critics for alleged incitement of violence, insults to religion, or insults to public figures and institutions, such as the judiciary and the military. Individuals also faced societal and official harassment for speech viewed as sympathetic to the MB, such as using a hand gesture showing four fingers, a reference to the 2013 security operation to disperse the sit-in at Rabaa al-Adawiya Square.

A counterterrorism law issued on August 15 provided a broad definition of terrorism, to include “any act harming national unity or social peace.” Human rights observers expressed concern that authorities could use the ambiguous definition to stifle nonviolent speech and nonviolent opposition activity.

Local and international rights groups reported increased charges under the blasphemy law, primarily targeting Christians but also atheists.

On January 10, a misdemeanor court sentenced 21-year-old student Karim El Banna to three years’ imprisonment for denigrating Islam, after he wrote a post on Facebook supporting a campaign titled “Professing Atheism.” According to HRW his lawyers appealed the verdict, and the court released him on bail of 1,000 Egyptian pounds (LE) (\$129). The court confirmed the original sentence in his absence when he did not appear for the first hearing in the appeal.

In April a Muslim resident of Naseriya village filed a police complaint accusing four Christian high school students and their teacher, Gad Youssef Younan, of denigrating Islam after they made a video in which the students appeared to pretend to perform a Muslim prayer. On April 7, authorities arrested Younan, and on April 10, they arrested the students. On May 14 and May 27, respectively, the court released Younan and the four students on bail. The prosecution referred the defendants to

misdemeanor court on charges of denigration of Islam, stirring strife, and publishing an offensive video. The trial continued at year's end.

Bishoy Armia Boulous, also known as Mohamed Hegazy, remained in pretrial detention at the end of the year, and his case had not been referred to court. Authorities arrested Boulous in July 2014 on accusations of blasphemy reportedly related to comments he made at a seminar in 2009. Boulous unsuccessfully sued the Ministry of Interior in 2009 to recognize his conversion from Islam to Christianity testing the constitutional right of freedom of religion.

Press and Media Freedoms: The constitution, the penal code, and the press and publications law govern media issues. The government regulated the licensing of newspapers, and controlled the printing and distribution of a majority of newspapers, including private newspapers and those of opposition political parties. The law does not impose restrictions on newspaper ownership.

The more than 20 state-owned media outlets broadly supported official state policy. The governmental Higher Press Council appointed and could dismiss editorial leadership of state-owned print outlets, and the governmental Egyptian Radio and Television Union appointed the heads of state-owned radio and television channels. Both state-owned and private media (including television and online journalism) sometimes criticized the government, but dominant media narratives supported the president and his policy initiatives.

On November 29, media reported authorities arrested journalist Ismail Alexandrani on arrival at Hurgada airport. He remained in NSS custody at year's end, according to a court order. According to local rights groups, he was under investigation for "reporting false news" and "joining a banned group." Alexandrani's reporting and scholarly work focused on the Sinai.

In November the governmental Radio and Television Union suspended Azza al-Henawy, an anchor for state-owned al-Qahera TV, from her position and referred her to an internal disciplinary investigation after she criticized the government response to flooding in the city of Alexandria and made allegations of corruption. The union stated she violated the channel's professional code, which bans anchors from expressing their personal opinions on air.

In June the State Information Services launched a new initiative called Fact Check Egypt (FCE). Foreign journalists based in the country said that FCE staff contacted them to challenge the use of anonymous sources and the publication of information that contradicted official statements. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued statements condemning articles critical of the country in international publications, sometimes citing the authors by name.

Violence and Harassment: According to press reports and local and international human rights groups, state and nonstate actors arrested and imprisoned, harassed, and intimidated journalists. A local media observation group reported 18 incidents against journalists covering parliamentary run-off elections on October 27-28. The violations included prohibiting journalists from covering the polling process, arrests, damaging journalists' equipment, and verbal assault. Local media reported that, on October 27, authorities arrested one local journalist and detained one foreign journalist while covering parliamentary elections. Authorities released both journalists after detaining them for a few hours.

According to a December 15 report by the international NGO Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 23 journalists remained in jail after authorities arrested them on a variety of charges throughout 2013-15. In most cases the charges were not directly related to journalistic activities, but authorities detained many while they were covering clashes between protesters and police. Authorities accused most of the journalists of affiliation with the MB. Additional charges varied from participation in illegal protests, publishing false news, spreading chaos to incite violence, murder, and possession of weapons. Of the imprisoned journalists, authorities convicted 11, and 12 were in preventative detention at year's end, either undergoing trial or pending investigation.

On January 1, the Court of Cassation ordered a retrial in the case of the three *al-Jazeera English* journalists sentenced in June 2014 to seven years' imprisonment on charges including "spreading false news" and aiding or joining a terrorist organization. On February 2, President Sisi ordered the deportation of one of the defendants, Australian citizen Peter Greste, by executive order, and authorities returned Greste to Australia before the retrial began. The retrial began in February (including Greste as a defendant in his absence), and on August 29, the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced the journalists to three years in prison. On September 23, President Sisi pardoned the two *al-Jazeera English* journalists remaining in the country, Egyptian citizen Baher Mohamed and Canadian citizen Mohamed Fahmy. Rights groups welcomed the pardons while asserting that trial procedures violated fundamental rights to due process.

On September 15, the Cairo Criminal Court began a trial of 48 defendants accused of being MB members and charged with participating in the March 2014 protest in Ain Shams during which journalist Mayada Ashraf was shot and killed while covering the clashes between protesters and police.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Official censorship occurred. On February 18, customs officials in Alexandria confiscated 400 copies of a book documenting graffiti and street art from the 2011 revolution, despite the book's receiving approval from the government's Censorship Authority. The local prosecutor's office stated it received information that the book's contents "incited revolt and rioting."

On May 11, government officials confiscated copies of privately owned *al-Watan* newspaper, which had published the headline "Seven Entities Stronger than Sisi." *Al-Watan* reissued the newspaper with a new headline, "Seven Entities Stronger than Reform." On March 11, *al-Watan* published an investigative report alleging some government ministries "evaded" taxes. Government officials confiscated all copies of the issue, and *al-Watan* reissued the newspaper, replacing the article with a report on the Economic Development Conference.

In May customs officials in Alexandria confiscated and disposed of Bibles imported from Spain and Qurans (allegedly "Shia versions") imported from Iran. According to local officials, authorities based the confiscation on objections from the Awqaf Ministry, al-Azhar, and the Coptic Orthodox Church, which have the authority to approve religious texts.

Some activists and many journalists reported privately they self-censored criticism of the government or comments that could be perceived as sympathetic to the MB, due to the extremely anti-MB and progovernment media environment.

On May 15, local media reported that privately owned OnTV “suspended” a new television show about women’s issues hosted by Reem Maged, after two episodes. According to media government officials “pressured” the channel to remove Maged, who has produced reporting critical of the government. The channel claimed the decision was made for financial reasons.

The Yaqeen News Network closed in July after security forces raided its headquarters, confiscated equipment, and arrested the director of the network, Yahia Khalaf. The Ministry of Interior claimed the network was the “media arm” of the MB. Khalaf, who is free on bail, faced charges of joining a banned group and fabricating video clips with the intention of defaming the armed forces.

National Security: The law allows government censors to block the publication of information related to intelligence and national security. Judges may issue and have issued restraint orders to prevent media from covering court cases considered sensitive on national security grounds. Rights groups stated authorities sometimes misused the orders to shield government, police, or military officials from public scrutiny. For example, the court issued such an order in the case of the CSF police officer prosecuted in the killing of activist Shaimaa El Sabbagh (see sections 1.a. and 1.d.). Citing safety and security, the government and military restricted media access to many parts of North Sinai.

A counterterrorism law issued on August 15 imposes a fine on any person who “intentionally publishes...or spreads false news” contradicting official Ministry of Defense statements. The fine is many times the average annual salary of most local journalists.

On November 8, military authorities summoned journalist Hossam Bahgat for questioning regarding a report he published describing a criminal military court’s conviction of 26 military officers for allegedly plotting a coup. Military authorities subsequently detained Bahgat for two days while military prosecutors investigated him on several potential charges, including publishing false news harmful to national security. On November 10, authorities released Bahgat without charging him; no information was available on the status of the investigation at year’s end.

Internet Freedom

The government did not generally restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, albeit with some exceptions. The constitution protects the right to privacy, including on the internet. The constitution provides for the confidentiality and “inviolability” of postal, telegraphic, and electronic correspondence, telephone calls, and other means of communication. They may not be confiscated, revealed, or monitored except with a judicial order, only for a definite period, and only in cases defined by law. The constitution prohibits the government from “arbitrarily” interrupting, disconnecting, or depriving citizens seeking to use all forms of internet communications. Law enforcement agencies occasionally restricted or disrupted individuals’ access to the internet, and the government monitored internet usage, relying on a law that only allows targeted interception of communications under judicial oversight and for a limited period of time and does not permit indiscriminate mass surveillance. The public prosecutor occasionally prosecuted individuals accused of posting “insulting” material.

The counterterrorism law issued on August 15 criminalizes the use of the internet to “promote ideas or beliefs that call for terrorist acts” or to “broadcast what is intended to mislead security authorities or influence the course of justice in relation to any terrorist crime.” The law also authorizes the

public prosecution and investigators to monitor and record online communications between suspects in terrorism cases for a period of 30 days, renewable in 30-day increments. The law does not specify a maximum time period.

The government attempted to disrupt the communications of terrorist groups operating in northern Sinai by cutting telecommunication networks: mobile services, internet, and sometimes landlines. Cuts continued on an average from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Networks were again fully accessible at approximately 8 p.m. and sometimes later. This tactic disrupted operations of government facilities and banks. The law obliges internet service providers and mobile operators to allow government access to customer databases, which can allow security forces to obtain information about activities of specific customers, which could lead to lack of online anonymity. There were no reports of widespread denial of service or blocking of social media sites during the elections and demonstrations that occurred during the year. Individuals widely used social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, during demonstrations and throughout the parliamentary election period and included widespread criticism of the government and security forces.

In May, Freedom House estimated internet penetration to be 32 percent. A local civil society organization estimated 57 percent of families had internet access at home; 24 million persons used Facebook and four million used Twitter.

There were reports that authorities monitored social media and internet dating sites to identify and arrest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were reports of government restrictions on academic freedom. According to media and local rights groups, a degree of self-censorship, similar to that reported by nonacademic commentators, allegedly existed when academics publicly commented on sensitive political and socioeconomic issues. A local rights group reported a university professor in Cairo received a disciplinary letter from his department due to his perceived political beliefs. In December novelist Alaa al-Aswany, who has been critical of the government, cancelled a public seminar in Alexandria, claiming that state security had ordered the cancellation.

There was censorship of cultural events. The Ministry of Culture must approve all scripts and final productions of plays and films. The ministry censored foreign films to be shown in theaters but did not censor the same films sold as DVDs.

On December 28, authorities raided the Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art and Rawabet Theater, which hosted lectures, symposia, and performances in addition to visual art exhibitions. According to press reports, security officials confiscated documents and computer equipment, and ordered the facilities closed. On December 29, authorities raided the Merit Publishing House and arrested one employee. Merit's founder wrote on social media that the raid may have been related to upcoming cultural events scheduled at the publishing house.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly “according to notification regulated by law.” Authorities implemented a 2013 demonstrations law that includes an expansive list of prohibited activities and gives the minister of interior the authority to prohibit or curtail planned demonstrations. Domestic and international human rights organizations asserted the law was not in keeping with international standards regarding freedom of assembly. There were protests throughout the year that varied widely in size, and some occurred without government interference. In other cases the government rigorously enforced the law restricting demonstrations, even in cases of small groups of protesters demonstrating peacefully.

Thousands of persons remained imprisoned who were arrested during 2013 and 2014 due to their participation in demonstrations (some of which were peaceful). Authorities held such individuals under charges of attending an unauthorized protest, incitement to violence, or “blocking roads.” Human rights groups claimed authorities inflated or used these charges solely to target individuals suspected of being members of groups in opposition to the government or those who sought to exercise the rights to free assembly or association.

Demonstrations, predominantly by MB-affiliated antigovernment protesters, continued on university campuses throughout the country, albeit fewer in number and smaller in size than in 2014. According to a local rights group, authorities arrested 761 students and expelled 281 students during the 2014-15 academic year. On March 10, following clashes on campus between police and pro-MB student protesters, police arrested 50 students from Fayoum University.

In January security forces arrested more than 500 individuals in connection with protests on the fourth anniversary of the January 25 Revolution, according to Ministry of Interior officials quoted in regional media.

On February 23, the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced prominent activist Alaa Abdel Fattah to five years in prison on charges of breaking the demonstrations law related to his participation in a protest in front of the Shura Council in 2013. The ruling was subject to appeal to the Court of Cassation, which at year’s end had not yet ruled on whether it will accept the appeal.

On May 23, a Cairo Misdemeanor Court acquitted 17 defendants, including activist Azza Soliman, on charges of breaking the 2013 demonstrations law. Authorities accused the defendants of organizing and participating in the January 24 march at which a CSF police officer shot and killed secular activist Shaimaa El Sabbagh (see sections 1.a. and 1.d.). Defendants claimed authorities targeted them in reprisal for their decision to testify against the CSF officer. According to media the court based its acquittal on the argument that the January 24 march was not political in nature, but rather a “celebration” of the anniversary of the 2011 revolution. The prosecution appealed the court’s ruling, and on October 24, the appeals court again acquitted all defendants. Local rights groups welcomed the verdict, although many criticized the prosecution’s decision to appeal the original verdict.

On December 13, a Cairo criminal court sentenced five individuals to two years’ imprisonment for breaking the 2013 demonstrations law and the 1914 protest law. Authorities arrested the defendants after a peaceful November 19 protest on the anniversary of 2011 clashes between protesters and CSF officers, which resulted in the death of more than 50 individuals over five days. Local rights

groups stated the prosecution failed to present evidence that the defendants participated in the demonstration or that the demonstration presented a threat to the public.

On January 27, the Court of Cassation upheld the three-year prison sentences of prominent activists Ahmed Douma, Mohammed Adel, and Ahmed Maher, charged in 2013 for inciting protests. The case was not subject to further review.

Freedom of Association

The constitution and the 2013 constitutional declaration provide for freedom of association. The law governing associations, however, significantly restricts this right. The law on associations affects all nongovernmental civil society associations, the overwhelming majority of which were domestic welfare, educational, and environmental foundations. The Ministry of Social Solidarity applied the law in a highly restrictive manner on international and domestic organizations receiving international funding, resulting in lengthy delays (which in some cases amounted to effective denials) of government approval for programs that domestic and international organizations sought to implement. Rights groups reported several incidents of security services ordering the cancellation of planned training programs or other events. According to ministry statements and local media, the Ministry of Social Solidarity closed 545 NGOs through November 12. Authorities alleged most shuttered NGOs were connected to the MB and, in some cases, the ministry implemented rulings issued by the Court of Urgent Matters.

A 2014 amendment to the penal code criminalizes the request for or acceptance of foreign funds, materiel, weapons, ammunition, or “other things” from states or nongovernmental organizations “with the intent to harm the national interest.” Violators may be sentenced to life in prison, or the death penalty in the case of public officials and for crimes committed during times of war or with “terrorist purpose.” The broad language raised concern among civil society the article could be used to prosecute NGOs receiving or requesting international funding.

At year’s end the conviction of 27 mostly foreign NGO workers sentenced in 2013 for operating unlicensed organizations and receiving foreign funding without government permission stood. Appeals for some defendants were pending at year’s end; defendants had not yet filed appeals in the remainder of cases.

The MB, the MB-affiliated FJP, and its NGO remained illegal, and the MB was a legally designated terrorist organization.

On September 22, authorities arrested Amr Ali, coordinator of the April 6 Youth Movement, a political advocacy group. According to local rights groups, he remained in custody and under investigation for accusations including “joining an unlawful movement,” “using force and terrorism to topple the government,” and “spreading false news.” At year’s end he was not formally charged.

Student union elections at some public universities were held in November, for the first time since 2013. Authorities effectively barred members of the MB and April 6th (banned by a 2014 court order) from participating in elections. The media reported some universities also excluded Revolutionary Socialist candidates from the lists of registered candidates, although the legal basis for doing so was unclear. On December 24, the Ministry of Higher Education nullified the results of the election of the Egyptian Student Union, the largest countrywide student union. The ministry

stated the cancellation was due to a procedural error at Zagazig University and announced that new elections would be held. Some civil society organizations and the presidents-elect of the Cairo University and Tanta University student unions accused the ministry of intervening in the electoral process because of the success of independent candidates.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, albeit with some exceptions, including the handling of potential refugees and asylum seekers. The Civil Aviation Authority, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and Interior, maintained a "no-fly" list that prevented some defendants in court cases from fleeing the country. MB members and other wanted individuals appeared on the list after mid-2013.

The government did not cooperate consistently with UNHCR and humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to asylum seekers and other persons of concern. The government frequently denied UNCHR access to places of detention, according to a local civil society organization.

In-country Movement: Citizens and foreigners may not travel in areas of the country designated as military zones. The government sought to prevent private individuals, journalists, and civil society activists from entering the Sinai Peninsula, stating it was to protect their safety; however, some persons avoiding government detection did enter the Sinai.

Foreign Travel: Men who have not completed compulsory military service may not travel abroad or emigrate. National identification cards indicated completion of military service. Married Bahais and their children faced difficulties obtaining national identification cards because the government did not recognize Bahai marriages as legitimate. Some Bahai men of draft age were unable to establish they either had fulfilled or were exempt from military service and, therefore, were unable to obtain passports. Police officials reportedly forced unmarried young women, sometimes including those in their 30s, to present their father's written permission to obtain a passport and to travel abroad, although this is not required by law.

Authorities required citizens between the ages of 18 and 45 to obtain permission from the Ministry of Interior to travel to 16 countries, an increase from 2014. On August 26, media reported new restrictions on travel to Guinea, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Malaysia, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, and Yemen. There were already restrictions for travel to Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Sudan, Syria, and Turkey. Enforcement of these regulations was sporadic. The government stated these regulations were intended to make it more difficult for citizens to join terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria and to stop flight of criminals. These regulations also affected the ability of other individuals to travel outside the country.

The government sometimes imposed travel bans on human rights defenders and political activists. The constitution states, “No citizen may be prevented from leaving the State territory.” In November, HRW announced it had documented 32 cases in which airport security officers prevented political activists from departing the country. In January authorities prevented democracy activist Esraa Abdel Fattah from departing the country and informed her that authorities had issued a travel ban in her name. She filed a lawsuit to challenge the ban, but the court dismissed the suit. Separately, authorities confiscated the passport of human rights defender Mohamed Lotfy and prevented him from traveling to Berlin to deliver a statement before the German parliament on the eve of President Sisi’s state visit to Germany in June. Abdel Fattah and Lotfy continued to be unable to depart the country.

Exile: There was no government-imposed exile, and the constitution prohibits the government from expelling citizens or banning citizens from returning to the country. Some Mubarak- and Morsy-era politicians lived outside the country by choice and alleged they faced government threats of prosecution.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The constitution provides for the protection of political refugees, but the laws do not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a comprehensive legal regime for providing protection to refugees. The government granted UNHCR with authority to make refugee status determinations, with some exceptions, such as Sudanese citizens, whom authorities most often treated as economic immigrants rather than as refugees. UNCHR does not register Libyan citizens, nor does it register or provide any assistance to Palestinian refugees in the country.

According to UNHCR, as of September there were approximately 188,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the country, coming mainly from Syria, Sudan, Iraq, and countries in the Horn of Africa. The number of Syrian nationals newly registered as refugees decreased dramatically from 2014. Observers attributed the decrease to the change of government policies since 2013, including the introduction of the visa system for Syrians, the security and socioeconomic situation, and increased difficulty transiting the country to neighboring countries. The number of African and Iraqi nationals registered as refugees, however, increased.

In 2012 and 2013 under the Morsy administration, the government accorded Syrians visa-free entry. Starting in mid-2013, the government applied a system of visa and security clearance requirements for Syrian nationals and Palestinian refugees from Syria, thus ensuring no direct entries from Syria since Egypt lacked consular services there. UNHCR reported cases of prolonged separation of Syrian families in Egypt and family members in Syria, Libya, or the Gulf countries. The government rarely granted family reunification visas.

Since the new regulations took effect in 2013, UNHCR stated authorities detained and deported dozens of Syrians who arrived in the country without a visa or with forged documents, usually to the transit countries from which they arrived, or to Turkey or Lebanon. According to UNHCR the number of Syrians using forged documents to travel to the country increased during the year. Stricter visa restrictions imposed by Jordan and Turkey also resulted in the return of some Syrians to Egypt, where they remained in prolonged detention.

Reports of irregular movements of individuals, including asylum-seekers, and of detention of foreign nationals attempting to depart the country irregularly remained numerous, after a dramatic increase in 2013. Syrians represented the largest portion of this group, which also included Sudanese, Eritreans, Somalis, Ethiopians, and other Africans. UNHCR observed increased African irregular departures from the country, particularly Sudanese nationals. In the first months of the year, UNHCR observed a new wave of irregular entries through the land route from Sudan (Wedi Halfa/Abu Simbel).

UNHCR access to detained registered refugees and asylum seekers was unscheduled and intermittent. According to a local rights group, authorities did not allow UNHCR access to the Qanater men's and women's prisons outside Cairo, which housed the majority of detained refugees and asylum seekers. Authorities denied UNHCR access to unregistered asylum seekers at all prison and detention facilities. The government subjected detained migrants, many of whom were Eritrean, Sudanese, and Somali (and may have had a basis for asylum claims) to prolonged administrative detention for unauthorized entry or residence. Detained migrants did not have access to UNHCR. Authorities often held them in jails, military camps, and regular prisons with convicted criminals.

Approximately 6,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria were also present in the country. The majority reportedly lived in Cairo while more than 1,000 were in Alexandria. The Palestinian Authority mission in the country provided limited assistance to this population, who were not able to access UNHCR assistance provided to Syrians due to governmental restrictions. Despite UNHCR's mandate for Palestinians outside of the fields of operations of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the government denied UNHCR permission to provide services, reportedly in part due to a belief that allowing UNHCR registration would negate Palestinian refugees' right of return. Similar to 2014 authorities detained a few Palestinian refugees from Syria, but authorities promptly released them.

Refoulement: According to human rights advocates, migrants detained while attempting to enter the country irregularly were typically given two options: return to their country of origin or enter indefinite administrative detention. Because the government denied UNHCR access to unregistered detained migrants and asylum seekers, the number of potential asylum seekers returned to their countries was unknown. Authorities frequently encouraged those detained to choose to return to their countries of origin to avoid continued detention, even in cases where the individuals expressed a fear of return. Authorities also deported children to their countries of origin without their parents or an adult caregiver. For example, in February authorities deported children recognized as refugees by UNHCR to their country of origin without their mother or an adult caregiver.

UNHCR reported authorities deported five Sudanese asylum seekers during the year after they attempted to depart from the country irregularly. Additionally, UNHCR noted that authorities deported to Yemen some Yemeni nationals who were attempting to depart from the country irregularly by sea. In 14 cases authorities deported Syrian nationals to Syria or to third countries (primarily Turkey and Lebanon) for having attempted to enter the country with invalid visas or for using a forged residency card or passport.

UNHCR stated the Syrian embassy implemented a restrictive policy regarding the renewal of expired passports of Syrian nationals in detention, regardless of the grounds for arrest. In such cases the Syrian embassy issued a travel document valid only for return to Syria; therefore, the absence of a valid national passport for Syrian refugees in detention resulted in either prolonged detention or

forced repatriation. According to UNHCR reports, the Syrian embassy renewed passports on an individual basis in a few cases for released detainees. Syrian authorities generally refused to renew passports for persons who had registered with UNHCR.

Fewer numbers of Palestinian refugees from Syria entered the country in an illegal manner with the intention to travel to Europe. In a number of cases, in the absence of valid travel documents or inability to confirm their identities, they faced either detention or deportation.

Refugee Abuse: Media, NGOs, and UNHCR staff reported few cases of attacks against Syrian refugees. According to UNHCR refugees reported harassment, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Refugee women and girls, particularly sub-Saharan Africans, faced significant societal, sexual, and gender-based violence.

According to a local civil society organization, police security sweeps increased in neighborhoods known to house Sudanese, other African refugees, and other migrants, resulting in increased detentions. Detainees reported being subjected to racist verbal abuse, beatings, and torture during detention.

There were multiple reports of security forces killing Sudanese migrants attempting to cross the border to Israel. On November 6, security forces fired on a group of migrants after the group fired on the security forces, killing one Sudanese migrant and injuring eight others. On November 15, security forces reportedly fired on a second group of Sudanese migrants, killing 15 and injuring eight.

In August military personnel fired on a group of refugees attempting to depart irregularly from the North Coast, injuring two and killing a four-year-old Syrian girl.

Reports of abuse by Sinai-based facilitators and captors of illegal migrants continued to decline.

Employment: Authorities did not grant most refugees legal authority to work. Those seeking unauthorized employment were challenged by lack of jobs and societal discrimination, particularly against sub-Saharan Africans. Refugees who found work took low-paying jobs in the informal market, such as domestic servants, and were vulnerable to financial and sexual exploitation by employers.

Access to Basic Services: Refugees, in particular those from sub-Saharan Africa, continued to face limited access to housing, public education, public health services, and other social services. The Ministry of Interior restricted some international organizations seeking to assist migrants and refugees in the Sinai but provided the International Organization for Migration access to some detention centers. UNHCR provided refugees with modest support for education and health care, as well as small monthly financial assistance grants for particularly vulnerable refugees.

Some public schools enrolled refugee children, but most did not, citing overcrowding and lack of resources. Instead, refugee children mainly attended refugee-run schools, private schools, or were home-schooled. The law requires government hospitals to provide free emergency medical care to refugees, but many of the hospitals did not have adequate resources to do so, and in some cases hospitals insisted that refugees provide payment in advance of receiving services. In response to the influx of Syrians, the government allowed Syrian refugees and asylum seekers access to public

education and health services while in the country. The availability and quality of services for Syrians was superior to those for other refugees, particularly sub-Saharan Africans. According to a local civil society organization, this circumstance was partly due to funding allocations by the UN and other international organizations.

UNRWA assisted the Palestinian refugees from Syria and provided them limited assistance in Egypt, where its presence is limited to a liaison office. The government helped facilitate a partnership between UNRWA and the Egyptian Red Crescent to provide Palestinians with vouchers from the UN World Food Program and health care at one hospital in Cairo.

Stateless Persons

Most of the 22 stateless persons known to UNHCR were Armenians displaced for more than 50 years. According to a local civil society organization, the number of stateless persons in the country was likely higher than the number recorded by UNCHR. The government and UNCHR lacked a mechanism for identifying stateless persons, including those of disputed Sudanese/South Sudanese nationality and those of disputed Ethiopian/Eritrean nationality. An unknown number of the approximately 50,000 to 100,000 Palestinian refugees were stateless.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides citizens the ability to change their government through the right to vote in free and fair periodic elections based on universal suffrage. Constraints on freedom of expression, association, and assembly limited citizens' ability to do so.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The country held parliamentary elections in several rounds October through December. Domestic and international observers concluded that authorities administered the parliamentary elections professionally and in accordance with the laws. Observers expressed concern about restrictions on freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression as well as their negative effect on the political climate surrounding elections.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The constitution grants citizens the ability to form, register, and operate political parties. The law requires new parties to have a minimum of 5,000 members from at least 10 governorates. The constitution also states "no political activity may be practiced and no political parties may be formed on the basis of religion or discrimination based on gender, origin, or sectarian basis or geographic location. No activity that is hostile to democratic principles, secretive, or of military or quasi-military nature may be practiced. Political parties may not be dissolved except by virtue of a court judgment."

The FJP, the political wing of the MB, remained banned.

Authorities did not ban other Islamist parties, including the Strong Egypt Party and the Building and Development Party, but they boycotted the parliamentary elections, citing a “negative political environment.” The Islamist al-Noor Party participated, winning 11 seats. In July, citing lack of jurisdiction, a court dismissed a lawsuit filed by a private individual demanding the dissolution of the al-Noor Party because of its Salafist affiliation.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Religious and cultural barriers continued to limit women’s political participation and leadership in most political parties and some government institutions. Voters elected a record number of 75 women and 36 Copts to parliament during the elections, a substantial increase over the 2012 parliament, which included 11 women and 13 Christians. The House of Representatives law outlines the criteria for the electoral lists which provided that the House of Representatives must include at least 56 women and 24 Christians. On December 31, the president appointed 28 additional cabinet members, including 14 women and two Christians. The House of Representatives law grants the president the authority to appoint House of Representatives members, not to surpass 5 percent of the total number of elected members. If the president opts to use this authority, half of his appointments must be women, according to the law. The new parliament included 89 women and 38 Copts.

Women led three cabinet ministries; not all cabinet members hold portfolios. No women or members of religious minorities were among the appointed governors of the 27 governorates. No women were on the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC). Legal experts said there were approximately 75 female judges, including 26 appointed during the year, with most serving in family courts; that total is less than 1 percent of judges. Several senior judges were Christian.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government did not consistently enforce the law. There were allegations members of the government, as well as the previous Mubarak and Morsy governments, engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Court cases still pending at year’s end were inconclusive regarding the accusations of impunity. The current government has pursued corruption cases against senior officials.

Corruption: The Central Agency for Auditing and Accounting (CAA) was the government’s anticorruption body and submitted reports to the president and the prime minister that were not available to the public. The auditing and accounting agency stationed monitors at state-owned companies to report corrupt practices. The Administrative Control Authority, another independent body, had jurisdiction over state administrative bodies, state-owned enterprises, public associations and institutions, private companies undertaking public work, and organizations to which the state contributes in any form.

On July 9, the government issued a decree allowing the president to dismiss the head and members of the CAA. The CAA challenged the constitutionality of the law in the SCC, because the constitution states that the agency is “technically, financially, and administratively independent.” The SCC took no action by year’s end. Observers did not judge the CAA to be sufficiently resourced, and the agency did not actively collaborate with civil society.

In May a media report based on disclosed financial records from fiscal years 2010-13 indicated authorities had moved billions of dollars into accounts potentially held illegally by state and commercial banks.

In September, Agriculture Minister Selah Eddin Helal resigned, and authorities immediately arrested him on charges that he and other ministry officials took bribes to help businessmen illegally acquire state land. Court proceedings against the minister and several other ministry officials continued at year's end.

Criminal proceedings on corruption charges continued against former members of the Mubarak regime. On May 9, the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced former president Mubarak and his sons, Alaa Mubarak and Gamal Mubarak, to three years each in prison as a consequence of the appeal of a corruption case in which authorities charged them with embezzling LE 125 million (\$16.2 million) for renovations to presidential palaces. They were also fined collectively 21.2 million LE (\$2.74 million) and ordered to repay LE 125 million (\$16.2 million) in stolen funds. On October 12, the court ordered the release of Alaa Mubarak and Gamal Mubarak from prison upon completion of their sentences. Observers expected the Court of Cassation to rule on January 9, 2016, on whether it will accept an appeal for a second retrial in the case.

On June 4, the Court of Cassation upheld a lower court's acquittal of Mubarak and his sons in a case involving a different set of corruption charges against them, including charges of illegally exporting gas to Israel. The court ordered a retrial on separate charges related to killing protesters in the same case (see sections 1.a. and 1.d.).

Financial Disclosure: There are no financial disclosure laws for public officials. A 2013 conflict-of-interest law forbids government officials from maintaining any pecuniary interest in matters over which they exercise authority.

Public Access to Information: There is no legal framework stipulating how citizens can access government information. The government generally was not responsive to requests for documents regarding government activities and did not provide reasons for its lack of responsiveness.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

The government continued to exhibit an uncooperative and suspicious approach to international and local human rights organizations. Government officials publicly asserted they shared the civil society organizations' goals, but rarely cooperated with or responded to the organizations' inquiries. Domestic civil society organizations criticized the government's consultations with civil society as insufficient. Provisions in the NGO law and penal code for penalties of up to life imprisonment for requesting or accepting foreign funding had a chilling effect on NGO operations (see section 2.b.).

Extended delays in gaining government approvals and an unclear legal environment continued to limit the ability of domestic and international NGOs to operate. State-owned and independent media frequently depicted NGOs, particularly international NGOs and domestic NGOs that received funding from international sources, as undertaking subversive activities. Some NGOs reported receiving visits or calls, to staff both at work and at home, from security service officers and tax officials monitoring their activities, as well as societal harassment.

Human rights defenders and political activists were also subjected to societal harassment and intimidation. Print and television media frequently published articles that included the names, photos, business addresses, and alleged meetings held by activists, including meetings held with foreign diplomatic representatives.

Many well-established, independent domestic human rights NGOs operated throughout the country. Internet activists and bloggers continued to play a significant role in publicizing information about human rights abuses. Authorities generally allowed civil society organizations not registered as NGOs to operate, but such organizations sometimes reported harassment, along with threats of government interference, investigation, or closure.

The government initiated investigations into the receipt of foreign funding by several human rights organizations. For example, in June a judge ordered a committee of experts to investigate the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, allegedly for illegal receipt of “foreign funding.” Human rights organizations claimed that these actions would force them to curtail their activities.

Major international human rights organizations such as HRW and AI did not have offices in the country after closing them in 2014 due to “concerns about the deteriorating security and political environment in the country.”

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government did not respond to the visit requests from eight UN special rapporteurs charged with investigation or monitoring of alleged human rights abuses, including the special rapporteurs for the independence of judges and lawyers; human rights defenders; freedom of religion; torture; arbitrary detention; extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary execution; human rights and counterterrorism; and the freedom of association and assembly; as well as the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. The oldest pending request was from the special rapporteur on torture in 1996. The most recent pending request was from the special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers in 2014. The government had agreed to but not yet scheduled dates for the visits of four special rapporteurs, including those responsible for the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography; violence against women; promotion of truth, justice, reparation, and provision for their nonrecurrence; and foreign debt. All four requests have been outstanding for more than one year. Authorities did not allow the ICRC access to prisoners and detainees. The Ministry of Interior provided some international organizations informal access to some detention centers where authorities detained asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants to provide humanitarian assistance (see section 2.d.).

Government Human Rights Bodies: The NCHR monitored government abuses of human rights and submitted citizen complaints to the government. A number of well-known human rights activists served on the organization’s board, although some observers alleged the board’s effectiveness was sometimes limited because it lacked sufficient resources and the government rarely acted on its

findings. The council at times challenged and criticized government policies and practices, calling for steps to improve its human rights record. For example, the NCHR called for improved prison conditions and for repeal of the demonstrations law.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution states that all citizens “are equal in rights, freedoms, and general duties without discrimination based on religion, belief, gender, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation, or any other reason.” Many aspects of the law discriminate against women and religious minorities, and the government did not effectively enforce prohibitions against such discrimination.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law prohibits rape, although the legal definition of rape covers only forced penetration of the female sexual organ by the male sexual organ, prescribing criminal penalties of 15 to 25 years’ imprisonment or life imprisonment for cases of rape involving armed abduction. Spousal rape is not illegal. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Civil society organizations reported police pressure not to pursue charges and fear of societal reprisal actively discouraged women from going to police stations to report crimes, resulting in a very small number of cases being investigated or effectively prosecuted. NGOs estimated the prevalence of rape was several times higher than the rate reported by the government.

On May 24, the Giza Criminal Court sentenced Khaled Abdel Rahman Mohamed, a low-ranking police officer, to life imprisonment for raping a 16-year-old female detainee with mental disabilities at Imbaba Police Station in August 2014.

Domestic violence continued to be a significant problem. A local rights organization estimated that 45 percent of women were subjected to domestic violence. The law does not prohibit domestic violence or spousal abuse, but authorities may apply provisions relating to assault with accompanying penalties. The law requires that an assault victim produce multiple eyewitnesses, a difficult condition for domestic abuse victims, making prosecutions extremely rare. NGOs reported police often treated domestic violence as a social rather than criminal matter.

Several NGOs offered counseling, legal aid, and other services to women who were victims of rape and domestic violence but operated under strained resources. The MOSS supported nine women’s shelters. The MOI includes a unit responsible for combating sexual and gender-based violence. The National Council for Women (NCW), a quasigovernmental body, was responsible for coordinating government and civil society efforts to empower women. On April 27, the NCW launched a five-year National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women with four strategic objectives: prevention, protection, intervention, and prosecution. Implementing ministries committed support, although it was unclear whether the government would fully fund, resource, or implement the strategy. On September 1, the Ministry of Justice established a position of Assistant Minister for the Rights of the Woman and Child and filled it with a female judge.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C is illegal, but it remained a serious problem for women and girls. According to the 2014 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS), published during the year by the Ministry of Health, the percentage of girls between 15 and 17 years old who had undergone FGM/C decreased to 60 percent, from 74 percent in 2008. According to the same survey, 92 percent of ever-married women between 15 and 49 years old had undergone FGM/C. The survey showed that 56 percent of mothers supported FGM/C, a decrease from 75 percent in 2000. The Ministry of Health prepared the EDHS in partnership with UN Population Fund, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other international partners. On June 14, the government launched a new National Strategy for the Abandonment of FGM/C, led by the population ministry in partnership with the United Nations and other international partners.

The law criminalizes FGM/C, except in cases of “medical necessity,” with penalties of three months to two years in prison or a fine of LE 5,000 (\$650). Rights groups pointed to the “medical necessity” exception as a problematic loophole that allowed the practice to continue. According to international and local observers, the government did not effectively enforce this law and did not make adequate budget allocations to raise awareness. On January 26, an appeals court convicted the doctor and the father of 13-year-old Sohair el-Batea, who died in 2013 while undergoing an illegal FGM/C procedure at a private clinic in Daqahliya governorate. They were the first individuals brought to trial since the 2008 law banned FGM/C. The court sentenced the doctor to two years' imprisonment for manslaughter, three years for practicing FGM/C, and ordered him to close his clinic for one year. The father received a three-month suspended sentence. On November 16, civil society organizations reported that authorities had not yet taken the doctor into custody, and his clinic remained open.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The law does not specifically address “honor” crimes, which are treated as any other crime. There were no reliable statistics regarding the incidence of killings and assaults motivated by “honor,” but observers stated such killings occurred, particularly in rural areas. On April 22, police arrested three suspects related to an “honor” crime in Minoufia governorate after a husband killed his wife for allegedly committing adultery.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment remained a serious problem. According to a study published in 2013 by the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, known as UN Women, 99 percent of women and girls in the country's sample reported they had experienced some form of sexual harassment. NGOs reported the overall incidence of sexual harassment increased during times of large public gatherings. Since 2014 the penal code has defined sexual harassment as a crime, with penalties including fines and sentences of six months to five years in prison. The media and NGOs reported that sexual harassment by police was also a problem, and the potential for further harassment further discouraged women from filing complaints. There have been no reported convictions under the antiharassment law, although media reported many arrests. Local press reported authorities arrested 29 men for harassment during Eid al-Fitr celebrations in July, although the outcome of these cases was unclear.

There were reports of police forces sexually assaulting women during arrest. On March 26, a video circulated on social media of five police officers sexually assaulting and beating two women during a security raid in Daqahliya governorate. The Ministry of Interior announced it would open an investigation, but it had not announced the results of the investigation by year's end.

Reproductive Rights: The law recognizes the basic right of married couples to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children; to manage their reproductive health; and to have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. The EDHS found that 61 percent of urban women and 57 percent of rural women used some form of family planning. The government did not restrict citizens' family-planning decisions, although men and women did not always have the information and means to make decisions free from discrimination and coercion. Social, cultural, and religious barriers restricted individuals', especially women's, rights to make reproductive decisions and to attain the highest standard of reproductive health. The Ministry of Health and Population distributed contraceptive materials and provided personnel to attend births, postpartum care to mothers and children, and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases at no cost. According to the 2014 EDHS, 90 percent of mothers received at least some antenatal care from a trained provider, and 83 percent of mothers had at least four antenatal visits. A doctor or trained nurse/midwife assisted at the delivery of 92 percent of all births with 87 percent occurring in a health facility. NGOs reported government family planning information and services were not adequate to meet the needs of the population, particularly outside urban areas. NGOs expressed concern over lack of access to reproductive information and services for adolescent girls in rural areas.

Discrimination: Women continued to face widespread societal discrimination, threats to their physical security, and workplace bias in favor of men that hindered their social and economic advancement. The NCW, members of which the government appointed, led efforts to combat discrimination.

The constitution provides for equal rights for male and female citizens. Women did not effectively enjoy the same legal rights and opportunities as men, and discrimination continued to be widespread. Aspects of the law and traditional practices continued to disadvantage women in family, social, and economic life.

Laws affecting marriage and personal status generally corresponded to an individual's religious group. For example, a female Muslim citizen cannot legally marry a non-Muslim man. If she were to do so unofficially, she would face significant societal harassment. Under the government's interpretation of Islamic religious law, any children from such a marriage could be placed in the custody of a male Muslim guardian. "Khula" divorce allows a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided she is willing to forgo all her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in unique circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religious group. Other Christian churches permitted divorce.

A Muslim female heir receives half the amount of a male heir's inheritance, and Christian widows of Muslims have no inheritance rights. A sole Muslim female heir receives half her parents' estate, and the balance goes to the siblings of the parents or the children of the siblings if the siblings are deceased. A sole male heir, who is expected to provide for relatives, inherits his parents' entire estate.

A woman's testimony is equal to that of a man in courts dealing with all matters except for personal status, such as marriage and divorce. In marriage and divorce cases, a woman's testimony must be judged credible to be admissible. Usually the woman accomplishes this credibility by conveying her

testimony through an adult male relative or representative. The law assumes a man's testimony is credible unless proven otherwise.

The law makes it difficult for women to access formal credit. While the law allows women to own property, social and religious barriers strongly discouraged women's ownership of land, a primary source of collateral in the banking system. The threat of criminal bankruptcy and fear of the conditions in prisons contributed to extremely low rates of women accessing commercial credit.

Women faced extensive discrimination in the labor force (see section 7.d.). Labor laws provide for equal rates of pay for equal work for men and women in the public but not the private sector. In 2014 the World Economic Forum found that the country's women received 78 percent of the income of their male counterparts--not of men in general. Educated women had employment opportunities, but social pressure against women pursuing a career was strong. Women's rights advocates claimed religious influence as well as traditional and cultural attitudes and practices inhibited further gains. Large sectors of the economy controlled by the military excluded women from high-level positions, since women do not serve in the military and thus did not have access to these jobs. Authorities permitted women only to serve in the medical corps of the armed forces and excluded them from compulsory military service. According to the UN Development Program, women represented 23 percent of the labor force. According to the governmental Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the female unemployment rate was more than 24 percent, compared with 9.8 percent for men. The Ministry of Social Solidarity operated more than 150 family counseling bureaus nationwide to provide legal and medical services to unemployed women who were unmarried or did not reside with family.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship through the citizenship of their parents. The mother or the father transmits citizenship and nationality. The government attempted to register all births soon after birth but faced resistance from citizens in remote and tribal areas, such as the Sinai Peninsula. The government cooperated with NGOs in addressing this problem. In some cases failure to register resulted in denial of public services, particularly in urban areas where most services required presentation of a national identification card.

Education: Education is compulsory, free, and universal until the ninth grade. The law provides this benefit to stateless persons and refugees. In practice, authorities allowed Syrian and Sudanese refugees access to public education, but often excluded other nationalities from public education. Other refugee children attended private and community-based schools, if they had the resources or assistance.

Child Abuse: The constitution defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. It stipulates the government will protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, mistreatment, and commercial and sexual exploitation. There were widespread reports of child abuse, according to local and international rights groups. According to a local rights group, hundreds of cases were recorded each month, and many cases went unreported. According to UNICEF at least 80 percent of children between 13 and 17 years old were exposed to some form of violence (physical, emotional, or sexual). No effective government institutions were dedicated to addressing child abuse, although several civil society organizations assisted runaway and abandoned children.

Rights organizations reported children faced mistreatment in detention, including torture, sharing cells with adults, denial of their right to counsel, and authorities' failure to notify their families. For example, on December 11, AI reported that security forces detained 14-year-old Mazen Mohamed Abdallah on September 30 and initially held him for seven days without contacting his family. Authorities later charged Abdallah with belonging to a banned group, protesting without authorization, and printing flyers inciting protests. AI reported that authorities tortured Abdallah, including by repeatedly raping him with a wooden stick and subjecting him to electric shocks, while in custody in adult detention facilities in the First Nasr City and the Second Nasr City. The Ministry of Interior denied these claims. Authorities transferred Abdallah to the Giza Child Center on December 13 and, on December 22, a children's court judge renewed his detention for an additional 45 days.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal age of marriage is 18. According to a panel hosted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva in 2014, 23 percent of girls married before age 18; as many as 21 percent married before age 15. As many as 15 percent of all marriages in the country were child marriages, according to remarks made by the minister of population to the media in August. In February the government lifted its previous reservation on an article of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child that prohibits marriage under age 18. The media reported some child marriages were temporary marriages intended to mask child prostitution. Families sometimes forced adolescent girls to marry wealthy foreign men in what were known locally as "tourism" or "summer" marriages for the purpose of sexual exploitation, prostitution, or forced labor. On December 8, the Ministry of Justice introduced measures intended to close legal loopholes and make tourism marriages more difficult to obtain. It changed an existing and long-standing system whereby a foreign man who wanted to marry an Egyptian woman more than 25 years younger than he is must pay a fine. The measure increased the fine from LE 40,000 (\$5,200) to LE 50,000 (\$6,500). Women's rights organizations argued that allowing foreign men to pay a fine in order to marry much younger women represented a form of trafficking and encouraged child marriage. They called on the government to eliminate the system altogether. The Antitrafficking Unit at the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, a governmental body, is responsible for raising awareness of the problem.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: See information for girls under 18 in women's section above.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law provides for sentences of not less than five years in prison and fines of up to LE 200,000 (\$26,000) for commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. The government did not adequately enforce the law. The minimum age for consensual sex is 18. NGOs and local media reported sex tourism and the number of street children in Cairo and other metropolitan areas (where criminals sometimes sexually exploited children) remained high due to economic hardship. Temporary marriages were also sometimes used to mask sexual exploitation of children and child prostitution.

Displaced Children: Experts who worked with street children struggled to define exactly to whom the term "displaced children" applied, and consequently estimates of the number of children on the streets varied. The Ministry of Social Solidarity estimated the number of street children to be 20,000, while civil society organizations estimated the number to be in the millions. Many were victims of violence and sexual abuse, including forced prostitution. The Ministry of Social Solidarity offered shelters to street children, but many chose not to use them because they closed at night, forcing the children onto the streets. Religious institutions and NGOs provided services for

street children, including meals, clothing, and literacy classes. The Ministry of Health and Population offered mobile health clinics staffed by nurses and social workers.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html and country-specific information at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/egypt.html.

Anti-Semitism

The country's Jewish community is tiny and dwindling. Criticism of Israel frequently reached the level of blatant anti-Semitism in public discourse. State-owned and private media used anti-Semitic rhetoric, including by academics, cultural figures, and clerics, with cartoons demonizing Jews. There were multiple reports of imams using anti-Semitic rhetoric in their sermons. Societal anti-Semitism was widespread. On March 5, teenagers shouting epithets desecrated graves at the Basateen Jewish cemetery in the south of Cairo.

For the fifth consecutive year, authorities cancelled the Abu Hassira celebrations scheduled for January, preventing an annual Jewish pilgrimage, including many Israelis, to the shrine of 19th-century scholar Rabbi Yaakov Abu Hassira. The cancellation followed a December 2014 administrative court decision to ban the festival permanently, stating the festival was a "violation of public order and morals" and "incompatible with the solemnity and purity of religious sites."

An appeal continued in the 2014 case of 37 Islamists sentenced to death and 492 others to life imprisonment whom a Minya criminal court described as "demons" who followed Jewish scripture. The court also described the men as "enemies of the nation" who used mosques to promote the teachings of "their holy book, the Talmud." The court had sentenced them for involvement in acts of violence, breaking into and burning a police station, burning police vehicles, stealing weapons, killing one police officer, and attempting to kill another in Minya in 2013. Authorities scheduled the next hearing for January 8, 2016.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution states all citizens "are equal in rights, freedoms, and general duties without discrimination based on...disability" among other attributes, but does not explicitly "prohibit" discrimination.

The law provides for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment but does not outlaw discrimination altogether (see section 7.d.). Government policy for employing persons with disabilities is based on a quota (5 percent of workers with disabilities) for companies with more than 50 employees. According to most sources, however, authorities did not enforce this quota, and companies often had persons with disabilities on their payroll to meet the quota without actually employing them. Although the constitution states persons with disabilities are equal

without discrimination before the law, at year's end no laws prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities in education, access to health care, or the provision of other state services, nor did laws mandate access to buildings or transportation. Widespread discrimination continued against persons with disabilities, particularly persons with mental disabilities, resulting in a lack of acceptance into mainstream society. Government-operated treatment centers for persons with disabilities, especially children, were of poor quality.

The Ministries of Education and Social Solidarity share responsibility for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities rode government-owned mass transit buses free of charge, but the buses were not wheelchair-accessible, and access required assistance from others. Persons with disabilities received special subsidies to purchase household products, wheelchairs, and prosthetic devices. Persons with disabilities also received expeditious approval for the installation of new telephone lines and received reductions on customs duties for specially equipped private vehicles.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law prohibits discrimination on any grounds. Nevertheless, dark-skinned Egyptians and sub-Saharan Africans faced discrimination and harassment. In particular Nubians from Upper Egypt experienced discrimination because of their skin color or because the public perceived them to be sub-Saharan African migrants or refugees. In December the government and local rights groups submitted reports on the country's nondiscrimination record to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

While the law does not explicitly criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity, it allows police to arrest LGBTI persons on charges such as "debauchery," "prostitution," and "violating the teachings of religion," and provides for prison sentences of up to 10 years. Reports of such arrests remained numerous during the year. Authorities did not use antidiscrimination laws to protect LGBTI individuals. Gay men, lesbians, and transgender persons faced significant social stigma and discrimination, impeding their ability to organize or publicly advocate on behalf of LGBTI persons. Information was not available on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care based on sexual orientation and gender identity. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination.

There were few reported incidents of violence against LGBTI individuals, although intimidation and the risk of arrest greatly restricted open reporting and contributed to self-censorship. Rights groups reported harassment by police, including being forced to pay bribes or to provide information about other LGBTI individuals to avoid arrest. On April 14, an appeals court affirmed the government's authority to deport or bar entry to foreigners who were gay.

There were reports that authorities used social media, dating websites, and cell phone apps to entrap persons they suspected of being gay or transgender. For example, in February the media reported the arrest of seven transsexual individuals on debauchery charges after police using fake identities located them using fake identities through social media, arranged a meeting, and then arrested them.

In March authorities charged the individuals in misdemeanor court with commercial sex trafficking and debauchery.

On January 12, a misdemeanor court acquitted all 26 men referred to trial in 2014 on charges of “practicing debauchery” and “indecent public acts” after police raided a traditional bathhouse known as a hammam in Cairo and arrested the men. Authorities reportedly subjected 21 of the individuals to forced anal examinations.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

HIV-positive individuals faced significant social stigma and discrimination in society and the workplace. The health care system provided anonymous counseling and testing for HIV, free adult and pediatric antiretroviral therapy, and support groups. Authorities paid insufficient attention to the specific needs of women and children, particularly in the areas of medical treatment, psychosocial support, and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

There were incidents of mob violence and vigilantism, particularly sectarian violence against Coptic Egyptians. In May, Muslim residents of Kafr al-Darwish village in Beni Suef Governorate threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at Christian-owned homes following an incident in which Ayman Tawfik, a family member of one of the Christian families in the village, posted cartoons of Mohammed online. On May 27, following several customary “reconciliation sessions,” local authorities expelled Tawfik’s extended family from the village. Authorities later allowed the family to return, but they conducted no investigation into the attacks on Christian properties.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, to bargain collectively, and to strike, with significant restrictions. The constitution provides for freedom of association, but authorities have not drafted implementing legislation. Older labor laws still on the books contradict this right, but authorities seldom enforced them.

The law provides for collective bargaining but imposes significant restrictions. For example, the government sets wages and benefits for all public-sector employees. The law does not provide for enterprise-level collective bargaining in the private sector but requires centralized tripartite negotiations with workers represented by a union affiliated with the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) and the Ministry of Manpower overseeing and monitoring collective negotiations and agreements.

The constitution provides for the right to “peaceful” strikes. The Unified Labor Law permits peaceful strikes but imposes significant restrictions for strikes to be considered legal, including

prior approval by a general trade union affiliated with the ETUF. In April an administrative court effectively criminalized strikes by public employees, arguing that sit-ins impeded the ability of public institutions to deliver services, “which constitutes a right of citizens.” On December 6, a higher court overturned that ruling.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Labor laws do not cover several categories of workers, including agricultural and domestic workers, among other sectors of the informal economy.

Government enforcement of applicable laws was inconsistent. While the government allowed new unions to register, it also occasionally used its powers to arrest striking workers and rarely reversed arbitrary dismissals. The government seldom followed the requirement for tripartite negotiations in collective disputes, and workers negotiated directly with employers, usually after resorting to a strike. When the government became involved, it most often was for dispute resolution rather than for genuine collective bargaining.

In August and September public-sector employees organized demonstrations against a new civil service law introduced in July. Workers, who planned continued protests through the end of the year, criticized the law for decreasing benefits, which the government stated was necessary for budgetary reform. Separately, in the largest labor action since June 2014, 24,000 workers at two of the country’s largest public-sector textile companies held an 11-day strike in October demanding payment of delayed bonuses promised under the civil service law.

Unions proliferated in recent years, but state-influenced trade union federations consistently sought their dissolution. Independent unions faced allegations from the ETUF and state-run media that “foreign interests” motivated their actions or connected them to “sabotage” or “terrorism.”

Two main independent trade union federations, the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions and the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (EDLC), continued to operate. In October workers also formed the National Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions, a coalition of 140 independent trade unions from the public and private sector whose leadership stated it focused on negotiations with the government rather than strikes or protests.

While it was no longer directly controlled by the state, observers still saw the ETUF as subordinate to the state, and authorities repeatedly postponed elections for new leadership. Government-appointed ETUF board members remained in place, despite the May 27 expiration of former prime minister Mehlab’s 2014 decree to extend the government-appointed board. The ETUF received some advantages from the state. The government refused to allow the independent EDLC to participate in the International Labor Conference, stating the ETUF was the sole legitimate representative.

Authorities arrested or subjected to other legal sanctions several labor organizers, often following the dispersal or end of a labor strike. In February police arrested Mohammed Zaki, a worker whom the state-owned Petro-trade fired for his involvement in a strike. The prosecution detained Zaki until October and charged him with belonging to a banned organization (the MB) and possession of a weapon. At year’s end the court case continued.

Workers frequently staged sit-ins on government and private property, often without obtaining the necessary permits. On June 22, the administrative prosecution referred garbage collectors and drivers to disciplinary committees after charging them for holding strikes. On August 10, public-sector employees protested the civil service law in front of the downtown Journalists Syndicate, resulting in one of the largest public demonstrations since the Protest Law went into effect. Unable to obtain permits for future protests, in September the workers attempted to use the officially designated space in al-Fustat Gardens for protesting without a permit. Security forces met them with roadblocks and other impediments.

Police, and the military to a lesser extent, engaged in the forceful dispersal of labor actions in isolated cases. In June military personnel killed a worker from the al-Arish cement factory in Sinai during a protest that workers organized against unsafe working conditions at the site. A video of the incident circulated online showed a soldier shooting toward the crowd of striking workers.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution states no work may be compulsory except by virtue of a law. Government did not effectively enforce the prohibition. Employers have subjected male and female persons (including citizens) from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa to forced labor in domestic service, construction, cleaning, begging, and other sectors. The government worked with NGOs to provide some assistance to victims of human trafficking.

See also the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The Child Law sets the minimum age for regular employment at 15 and at 13 for seasonal employment. The constitution defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. A Ministry of Manpower decree bars children under age 18 from 44 specific hazardous occupations, while the Child Law prohibits employment of children under 18 from work that "puts the health, safety, or morals of the child into danger." Provincial governors, with the approval of the minister of education, may authorize seasonal work (often agricultural) for children age 12 years or older, provided duties are not hazardous and do not interfere with schooling. The labor code and Child Law limit children's work hours and mandate breaks. The labor code explicitly excludes domestic work, work in family businesses, and work in noncommercial agriculture from minimum age and other restrictions.

Overall, authorities did not enforce child labor laws effectively. The Ministry of Manpower, in coordination with the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) and the Ministry of Interior, enforced child labor laws in state-owned enterprises and private-sector establishments through inspections and supervision of factory management. Labor inspectors generally operated without adequate training on child labor issues, although the Ministry of Manpower continued to offer some child-labor-specific training. The government did not inspect noncommercial farms for child labor, and there were very limited monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for children in domestic service. When authorities prosecuted offenders, the fines imposed were often as low as LE

500 (\$65), insufficient to deter violations. The government did not enforce child labor laws in the informal sector.

Data was not available on Ministry of Manpower inspections for the use of child labor. Where child labor was found, the ministry issued warnings, fines, or referred the offending companies to the prosecutor general.

Although the government often did not effectively enforce relevant laws, authorities continued to implement a number of social, educational, and poverty reduction programs to reduce children's vulnerability to exploitive labor. The NCCM, working with the Ministries of Education and Social Solidarity, sought to provide working children with social security safeguards and to reduce school dropout rates by providing families with alternative sources of income.

Child labor occurred, although estimates on the number of child laborers varied. The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (the government's main statistical authority) reported that 1,594,000 children worked, primarily in the agricultural sector in rural areas but also in domestic work and factories in urban areas, often under hazardous conditions. Children also worked in light industry, the aluminum industry, construction sites, and service businesses such as auto repair. According to government, NGO, and media reports, the number of street children in Cairo continued to increase in the face of deteriorating economic conditions. Such children were at greater risk of sexual exploitation or forced begging. In some cases employers abused or overworked children.

Also see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution states all citizens "are equal in rights, freedoms, and general duties without discrimination based on religion, belief, gender, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation, or any other reason." It does not specify age, citizenship, sexual orientation or gender identity, or HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases. The law provides for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment but does not completely outlaw discrimination. The government did not effectively enforce prohibitions against such discrimination. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to women and persons with disabilities (see section 6). Discrimination against migrant workers occurred (see section 2.d.).

An employee facing discrimination can file a report before the local government labor office. If the employee and the employer are unable to reach an amicable settlement, they take the claim to administrative court, which may order the employer to redress the complaint or to pay damages or legal fees. According to local rights groups, implementation of the law was inadequate. Additionally, the lengthy and expensive litigation process could deter employees from filing claims.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The government introduced a monthly minimum wage of LE 1,200 (\$155) for government employees and public sector workers. According to labor rights organizations, the government implemented the minimum wage for public sector workers but applied it only to direct government employees and included benefits and bonuses in calculating total salaries. Most government workers already earned income equal to or more than the announced minimum wage. For government employees and public-business-sector workers, the government also set a maximum wage limit at 35 times the minimum wage (LE 42,000 per month, equal to \$5,400 per month). There was no private-sector minimum wage. The most recent World Bank estimates placed the poverty rate in the country at 25 percent. The law does not require equal pay for equal work.

The law stipulates a maximum 48-hour workweek for the public and private sectors and provides for premium pay for overtime and work on rest days and national holidays. The labor law prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. The government sets worker health and safety standards, for example prohibiting employers from maintaining hazardous working conditions. The law excludes agricultural, fisheries, and domestic workers from regulations concerning wages, hours, and working conditions.

The Ministry of Manpower is responsible for enforcement of labor laws and standards for working conditions. Due in part to insufficient resources, labor law enforcement and inspections were inadequate. The ministry did not attempt to apply labor standards to the informal sector. Penalties, especially as they were often unenforced, did not appear sufficient to deter violations. By law workers are allowed to remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to employment, although authorities did not reliably enforce this right.

The government provided services, such as free health care, to all citizens, but the quality of services was often poor. Other benefits, such as social insurance, were available only to employees in the formal sector.

Many persons throughout the country faced poor working conditions, especially in the informal economy, which employed up to 40 percent of workers, according to some estimates. Domestic workers, agricultural workers, workers in rock quarries, and other parts of the informal sector were most likely to be subjected to hazardous or exploitive conditions. There were reports of employer abuse of citizen and undocumented foreign workers, especially domestic workers. Little information was available on workplace fatalities and accidents.

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