



RESOLUTION ON EGYPT

Freedom of expression in Egypt is at the worst it has been for decades. Crackdowns on civil society organisations are rapidly increasing and dozens of writers have been arrested or forced to flee the country to escape the oppression of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's regime. Al-Sisi came to power in the wake of the ousting of former president Mohamed Morsi on 3 July 2013 following the Egyptian coup d'état.

Over the last few years, PEN has documented the cases of many writers, among them journalists, poets, artists and academic researchers, who have been detained under charges related to their writings and civil society activism. The following recent cases illustrate the degree of oppression and the worsening climate for freedom of expression in Egypt:

- **Galal El-Behairy**, a poet, was arrested in Egypt on 3 March 2018. He was held incommunicado for a week before appearing before the High State Security Court on 10 March, showing signs of severe torture. El-Behairy remains in detention, facing charges related to his latest book of poetry 'The Finest Women on Earth', despite it not having yet been published. He is also under investigation in relation to lyrics he wrote for artist Ramy Essam's song 'Balaha', which criticises Egyptian government policies.
- **Hesham Gaafar**, a well-known writer and political reformist who has been arbitrarily detained for over two years. He was arrested on 21 October 2015 and has frequently been held in pre-trial detention. There are grave concerns about his deteriorating health¹.
- **Wael Abbas**, a prominent Egyptian blogger and political activist who has been arbitrarily detained since his arrest on 23 May 2018. Abbas was questioned by Egypt's Supreme Security Prosecution, accused of 'joining a terrorist group in realising its objectives', 'spreading false news damaging public security and public interest' and 'using social media to spread ideas inciting to commit terrorist acts'².

Harassment is another method being used to silence dissident voices. PEN has worked on the case of three Egyptian writers and journalists who were dismissed from their work at a leading newspaper on

¹ For more information, see PEN International, Egypt: ongoing arbitrary detention and serious health concerns of prominent Egyptian writer, 7 October 2017, available on:

<http://pen-international.org/news/egypt-ongoing-arbitrary-detention-and-serious-health-concerns-of-prominent-egyptian-writer>

² PEN International, Egypt: prominent Egyptian writer and blogger under arrest and investigation, 1 June 2018, available on : <http://pen-international.org/news/egypt-prominent-egyptian-writer-and-blogger-under-arrest-and-investigation>

26 July 2017 for expressing an opinion that contradicted the official position of the Egyptian authorities³.

Furthermore, Al-Sisi's regime has adopted numerous laws that impose restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful activism. As mentioned in PEN's previous resolution on Egypt, the new Anti-Terrorism law passed in August 2015 prevents the media from publishing information on militant violence and introduced heavy fines for anyone found guilty of doing so. A new Cybercrimes law, approved in June 2018 by the Egyptian parliament, imposes substantial restrictions on online freedom of speech with heavy sanctions of up to five years imprisonment⁴. These laws constitute a significant threat to the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to fair trial. They are being used to criminalise writers, human rights activists, and intellectuals who criticise the authorities.

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International calls on the Egyptian authorities to:

- Respect the right to freedom of expression, in accordance with the Egyptian Constitution and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Egypt is a state party;
- Release all those held solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and other related rights immediately and unconditionally, and drop the charges against them;
- Protect all detainees from torture and ill-treatment pending release, by ensuring access to adequate medical treatment, legal counsel of their choice and family members, , in accordance with The Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. (the Nelson Mandela Rules);
- Repeal all legal provisions undermining the right to free expression, and ensure that journalists and bloggers can work without fear of reprisals and free from harassment.

³ See PEN International, Egypt: PEN condemns the arbitrary dismissal of three journalists from newspaper, 18 August 2017, available on : <http://pen-international.org/news/egypt-pen-condemns-the-arbitrary-dismissal-of-three-journalists-from-newspaper>

⁴ SMEX Egyptian Parliament Passes Cybercrimes Law to Legitimize its Efforts to Curb Free Speech, , June 14, 2018, available on : https://smex.org/egypt-passes-cybercrimes-law-to-legitimize-its-efforts-to-curb-free-speech/?utm_source=Social+Media+Exchange+%28SMEX%29+Newsletter&utm_campaign=25029d9146-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_07_03_01_52&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_de3253d538-25029d9146-96967815