

## RESOLUTION ON EGYPT

The climate for free expression in Egypt has deteriorated sharply in recent years. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, it was one of the world's worst jailer of journalists in 2015. Egypt has continued to silence voices of dissent in 2016, and PEN International is aware of at least 11 imprisoned writers in the country. Under the new [Anti-Terrorism law](#) passed in August 2015, the media are prevented from publishing information on militant violence which differs from official accounts and face heavy fines if found guilty.

PEN International has been monitoring with concern the rise in the number of writers and journalists who have been detained or imprisoned solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, including during journalistic, artistic, or human rights work. For example, in January 2016, the poet Fatima Naoout was sentenced to three years' imprisonment on charges of 'contempt of Islam' and 'disturbing public peace' for a comment made on Facebook criticising a traditional Islamic celebration. In the same month, poet Omar Hazek was banned from leaving Egypt to accept a PEN/Oxfam Novib award for freedom of expression. And in February 2016, author Ahmed Naji began serving a two-year prison sentence for 'defaming public morals' in his book *The Use of Life*.

PEN International is also concerned by the increase in blasphemy charges brought against writers such as author Karam Saber and Facebook user Karim al-Banna who were both handed prison sentences in separate cases for expressing their opinions on religion (see below Annex under 'Sentenced').

Restrictions on freedom of expression in Egypt have also been accompanied by a crackdown on cultural houses, including several raids on a publishing house and an art gallery in 2015 as well as on human rights defenders, with NGO workers repeatedly being summoned for questioning, banned from travelling and having their assets frozen. For example, female activist Mozn Hassan was banned from travel in June 2016 as she tried to leave Egypt to attend a human rights convention. Additionally, PEN International is deeply concerned by reports of governmental interference with the Journalists Syndicate in violation of articles 76 and 77 of the Egyptian Constitution. On 30 May 2016, the authorities arrested the head of the Egyptian Press Syndicate and two colleagues. Earlier in the month, heavily armed members of the National Security agency stormed the offices of the Journalists Syndicate, arresting journalists Amr Badr and Mahmoud al-Saqqa. Under Egyptian law, permission from the Public Prosecutor is required in order to search the Press Syndicate premises and any search must be carried out in the presence of the head of the Syndicate or other senior management.

### **The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, meeting at its 82nd World Congress in Ourense, Galicia (Spain), 26th September to 2nd October 2016, urges the Egyptian government to:**

- Release immediately and unconditionally all writers, journalists, bloggers and activists imprisoned and detained for peacefully exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression;
- Repeal the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Law in order to comply with Egypt's obligations under international law regarding freedom of expression;
- Ensure that Article 178 of the penal code, which criminalises content that violates public morals, is not used to impose restrictions which exceed those that may be imposed under international law;

- Repeal or amend all laws that violate Egypt's obligations under international law;
- Repeal the [Law on Associations and Foundations](#) in order to allow all non-governmental organisations to operate freely within the country with access to the necessary resources;
- Guarantee the independence of the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate and Egyptian Writers Union;
- Protect the rights of all to freely express their views, whether as citizens, journalists, or writers, as protected under the Egyptian Constitution and as per Egypt's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)