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Detention with no end in Sight for Human Rights Defender Hanan Badr el-Din

On the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, ten organizations are urging Egyptian authorities to drop the preventative detention order against Hanan Badr el-Din, a human rights defender and co-founder of the “Association of the Families of the Disappeared” group. The organizations urge Egyptian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Hanan Badr el-Din. She has already spent more than three months in detention, solely for her work in defending the rights of people who has been forcibly disappeared.

On 6 May 2017, police officers arrested Hanan Badr el-Din Abdel Hafiz Othman, while she was visiting a victim of enforced disappearance who has now been located and remains in detention at Qanatar prison, North of Cairo. Hanan Badr el-Din was aiming to get information about her husband who had been forcibly disappeared since 27 July 2013.

After the visit, prison security officials detained her and confiscated her belongings, which included a handwritten note with information about her husband’s whereabouts. The prison officers accused her of trying to smuggle the papers as well as banned objects, including a flash drive into the prison.

According to her lawyer, prison security officials initially detained Hanan in a cell for 3 hours before she was interrogated by National Security Agency (NSA) officers without a lawyer. On 7 May, Hanan Badr el-Din was transferred to Qanatar police station and then to the South Banha prosecutor, who ordered her detention pending NSA investigations. On 8 May, the NSA report claimed that Hanan Badr el-Din was a member of the banned Muslim Brotherhood organisation. That same day, prosecutors ordered her preventative detention for 15 days so they could investigate the charge of belonging to a banned group. Her detention has continued to be renewed since.

Khalid Mohamed Hafez Ezz el-Din, Hanan’s husband, was forcibly disappeared on 27 July 2013 while attending a protest. She last saw him that same day, on television, where she could see he was wounded and at a field clinic. However, when she went to the clinic, she was unable to find him. Since then, Hanan Badr el-Din has been continuously looking for her husband, inquiring as to his fate and whereabouts in police stations, prisons, hospitals, and morgues. She has yet to receive any significant information from the authorities.

During her search for her husband, Hanan Badr el-Din came into contact with other people who were also looking for their relatives who have been subjected to enforced disappearance. In early 2014, the families of the victims of forced disappearance established the “Association of the Families of the Disappeared” in response to the proliferation of this practice by the Egyptian security forces. The group aims to determine the fate and

whereabouts of their disappeared family members. By mid-2015, the group began to campaign publicly by directly addressing the government and calling on them to divulge the fate and whereabouts of people who were forcibly disappeared.

Since 2015, there has been a rise in documented cases of enforced disappearances. Individuals were abducted from their homes, streets, or places of work, and subjected to incommunicado detention for periods up to seven months. During detention, the victims were tortured to obtain “confessions” to be used against them or to implicate others. Victims of enforced disappearance include children as young as 14 years old.

In addition, there have been cases of extrajudicial executions of people suspected of been involved in acts of violence are usually linked to enforced disappearances, with the bodies of people who have been forcibly disappeared being subsequently found in the morgue. The Egyptian authorities typically announce that those killed were shot in an exchange of fire with the security forces despite the fact that the detainees were in the state’s custody when killed.

The continued detention of Hanan Badr el-Din reflects the persistent trend of harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders by Egyptian authorities through the misuse of the criminal justice system. Hanan Badr el-Din has been imprisoned solely for her peaceful human rights work and actively looking for her forcibly disappeared husband.

We the undersigned organisations reiterate our calls to the Egyptian authorities to:

- Release Hanan Badr el-Din immediately and unconditionally and drop all charges against her as she is being held solely for her work in defending human rights;
- Inform Hanan Badr el-Din without delay of the fate and whereabouts of her husband Khaled Ezz el-Din, and similarly inform the families of all victims of enforced disappearance of the fate and whereabouts of their relatives;
- Order all security personnel and other state officials to immediately cease the practice of enforced disappearance and send a clear message that such acts will not be tolerated;
- Promptly establish an independent commission of inquiry to conduct a thorough investigation into allegations of enforced disappearances, among other human rights violations, and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable;
- Ensure a safe and enabling environment in which it is possible to defend and promote human rights without fear of punishment, reprisal or intimidation.

Signatories:

- Adalah Center for Rights & Freedoms
- Al Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence
- Amnesty International
- Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression
- Committee for Justice
- Hisham Mubarak Law Center

- The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information
- The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
- The Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms
- The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights