

URGENT ACTION

EGYPTIAN NGOS AT RISK AS DEADLINE LOOMS

Egyptian human rights organizations have been warned they face closure and criminal prosecution, ahead of a government deadline for them to register under the Law on Associations. The authorities have also proposed a draft law that would erode the independence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and subject them to crushing new restrictions.

The Ministry of Social Solidarity warned all NGOs on 18 July 2014 that they must register under the Law on Associations (Law 84 of 2002) "within 45 days" (by 2 September) or be held "accountable" according to the law. Many Egyptian human rights organizations operate as law firms or not-for-profit companies because the current law requires them to get permission from the Ministry of Social Solidarity before they can register and the authorities have in practice either refused to grant them registration or have ignored their applications to register. Staff working for human rights organizations have told Amnesty International they fear that the authorities will shut down unregistered NGOs and possibly prosecute their staff.

The authorities have proposed a more repressive new legislation on NGOs than the current one. This draft law would give the government sweeping powers over NGOs' registration, funding and activities, and put members of the Ministry of Interior and the General Intelligence Services on a committee overseeing international funding and the work of foreign NGOs. Egypt's President could pass the draft law by decree at any time, human rights organizations have warned.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the Egyptian authorities to withdraw the new deadline for registration as the current law 84/2002 requires prior permission of the government rather than registration by notification;
- Urging them to end their crackdown on civil society, in particular by ending investigations into the legitimate, peaceful activities of human rights organizations and the harassment of human rights defenders;
- Calling on the authorities to withdraw the current draft law;
- Urging them to ensure that any legislation regulating non-governmental organizations upholds the right to freedom of association.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 OCTOBER 2014 TO:

Minister of Social Solidarity
Her Excellency Ghada Waly
Ministry of Social Solidarity
19 Maraghi Street
Giza
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 33375390
Salutation: Your Excellency

Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister
Mahy Hassan Abdel Latif
Multilateral Affairs and International
Security Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 574 9713
Email: contact.us@mfa.gov.eg
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

President of the National Council for
Human Rights
Mohamed Fayek
69 Giza St. – next to the Embassy of
Saudi Arabia
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 37624852

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Egypt has a vivid civil society despite restrictions by the authorities on freedom of expression, association and assembly. Egyptian human rights organizations have been working on a wide range of issues like torture, unfair trials, providing psychological and medical support to survivors of violence, women's rights and informal settlements.

Law 84 of 2002 already gives the government wide-ranging powers over the registration and funding of NGOs. The draft legislation, seen by Amnesty International, would bar NGOs from conducting field research or surveys, or working with foreign organizations, without first getting permission from the government. It would give the authorities new powers to dissolve NGOs or deny them legal registration, on the vague grounds that they "threaten national unity" or "violate public order or morals".

The draft law would also create a Co-ordinating Committee made up of government officials, including representatives of the Ministry of Interior and the General Intelligence Services, who would have control over anything to do with the registration, activities and funding of foreign NGOs in Egypt, as well as over any foreign funding received by Egyptian NGOs. It is also likely to impose severe restrictions on Amnesty International's access to Egypt and its activities within the country, as well as those of other international human rights organizations and NGOs working in the fields of development and political reform.

The authorities have said they will pass the law after a new parliament is elected, later this year. However, in practice they have been ready to pass other repressive legislation, such as a law on protests in November 2013, even without waiting for the election of a new parliament.

The authorities have cracked down on NGOs, including human rights organizations, for many years, but have done so more severely since the 2011 uprising. In mid-2011, the government launched an inquiry into the registration and funding of civil society, later ordering a criminal investigation. The inquiry came after the US ambassador said the US authorities had allocated millions of dollars of aid to Egyptian NGOs without seeking the government's permission.

In December 2011, prosecutors accompanied by armed security forces raided five international NGOs and two Egyptian human rights organizations, shutting down their offices and arresting their staff. In June 2013, a court convicted 43 NGO staff of working at unregistered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and receiving illegal foreign funding. All were sentenced (most of them in their absence) to prison terms of between one and five years.

The armed security forces raided the headquarters of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, in Cairo, on 18 December 2013, arresting a number of staff and volunteers, holding them incommunicado for several hours and beating them. All were quickly released, except for 6 April youth movement activist Mohamed Adel, who was detained as part of a criminal case. The security forces raided the Alexandria office of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights on 22 May 2014, arresting at least 15 lawyers and activists attending a conference to support a detained protester. All were released after spending few in detention.

In August 2014, the Egyptian authorities barred two staff from Human Rights Watch from entering the country to launch a new report on protester killings. The organization had closed its offices earlier in the year, citing security concerns.