

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/egypt-more-worrying-violations-of-11-12-2013,45590.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Egypt

Constant harassment

More worrying violations of freedom of information

11 December 2013

Reporters Without Borders condemns the Egyptian government's continuing crackdown on news media and journalists.

Metin Turan, a Turkish journalist working as *Turkish Radio and Television's* correspondent, was finally released on 9 December after being held since 16 August but many other journalists are still detained or are being prosecuted before civilian or military courts.

At the same time, the proposed new constitution contains provisions that pose a threat to freedom of information.

"We are concerned about the many contradictory signals that media personnel are getting from the Egyptian authorities," Reporters Without Borders said. "It is becoming harder and harder to work as a journalist in Egypt. Arrest, imprisonment on spurious charges and an increase in prosecutions are having a major deterrent effect on journalists.

"These practices must stop and the journalists still being held in connection with their work must be freed immediately and unconditionally. The Egyptian authorities have a duty to act as guarantors of freedom of information."

Partial protection in draft constitution

The draft constitution that the "Committee of 50" unveiled at the start of December contains a number of encouraging provisions that represent an improvement in protection for freedom of information.

It would guarantee freedom of expression and opinion (article 65), media freedom (article 70) and media independence (article 72). Article 71 bans censorship and prison sentences for media offences.

There would nonetheless be two significant and dangerous exceptions to the censorship ban. The government would be able to censor both in wartime and when a "state of emergency" was declared. But nothing explicit is said about its censorship powers and how they could be used. This is a serious danger for freedom of information.

Arrests and detention continue

Despite these constitutional undertakings, the authorities are continuing a campaign of arbitrary arrests and detention of media personnel. Many journalists were arrested in November, above all journalists working for media operated by or linked to the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Directorate of Security [arrested Said Abu Haj](#), a correspondent for the North Sinai Media Centre, at his work place on 5 November. Exactly what he is charged with and whether it is linked to his work are not known. But [a North Sinai court extended his detention](#) for another 15 days on 17 November "for the purposes of the investigation."

Ahmed Al-Sioufi, the head of the Cairo bureau of the Iranian TV station *Al-Alam*, was [arrested](#) again at his home on the morning of 7 November. Where he is being held and what he is charged with are unknown. He was released after 24 hours when he was [previously arrested](#) on 20 July.

Amro Qazzaz, the head of the reportedly pro-Muslim Brotherhood [Rassd](#) news network, was [arrested](#) at his home on 12 November. The reason for his arrest and his place of detention are still unknown.

Hani Salah Eddine, the managing editor of the *Misr 25* TV channel, was stopped at Cairo airport on 28 November and prevented from flying to London for a conference. [He was then summoned before the prosecutor-general and arrested on 1 December](#) in an investigation into the "dissemination of mendacious information" and "inciting violence." He is still held.

The latest journalist to be detained is **Bishoy Armia**, a Coptic Christian reporter who works for [Al-Tarek TV](#), a Christian satellite TV network based in the United States. He was [arrested](#) in the village of Badraman, in the southern province of Minya, while filming Coptic Christian homes and buildings that had been damaged.

On 6 December, [Minya's prosecutor ordered him held](#) for 15 days on charges of inciting sectarian strife and "transmitting a false image of persecution of Egypt's Copts."

Journalists are also often briefly arrested while covering protests against military abuses. **Aaron T. Rose**, a US photographer working for *Daily News Egypt*, was arrested while covering a demonstration outside Al-Ashar University on 24 November and [was held until around midnight](#).

Bassem Al-Sharif, a reporter for the [Moheet](#) news website, was less lucky after being [arrested](#) while covering protests in Cairo on 29 November. He is still being held.

Despite Metin Turan's release, other journalists continue to be held months after their arrest. *Al-Jazeera Mubashir Misr* cameraman **Mohamed Badr** has been held without interruptions since 15 July. *Al-Jazeera Mubashir Misr* reporter **Abdullah Al-Shami**, who was arrested on 14 August, is being held in [appalling conditions](#) at Abu Zaabal prison, 20 kms outside Cairo.

Criminal prosecutions by both civilian and military courts

Prosecutions are also used to harass media personnel. For example, **Magdy el Gellad**, the former editor of *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and current editor of *Al-Watan*, and *Al-Masry Al-Youm* reporter **Mohamed Senhuri** are being [prosecuted before a criminal court](#) over a 2012 article in which a judge, Hisham Al-Genina, was quoted as criticizing the lack of transparency in the Judges Club elections.

The [next hearing](#) in this trial has been set for 24 December.

Abdel Halim Qandil, the editor of the daily *Sawt Al-Ummah*, is being [prosecuted](#) on charges of "defamatory comments" and "insulting judges and the judiciary" for comments he made during a TV debate. He was released on bail after an investigating judge ordered his arrest on 11 November and the proceedings are going ahead.

Qandil is also being prosecuted over a 2012 article in which he is accused of insulting government officials. The next hearing in this case has been set for 1 January.

Bassem Youssef, the host of the TV programme *Al-Barnameg*, [is being investigated in connection with around 30 complaints](#) brought against him after his programme on 26 October, some of them accusing him of insulting the armed forces.

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