



Open letter to the Embassies of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America to Egypt, and the European Union Delegation to Egypt

30 November 2022

Subject: Continued repression of Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights staff

We, the undersigned Egyptian and international non-governmental organizations, urge you to take action to end the restrictive and arbitrary measures imposed on members of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). These measures, which include travel bans, asset freezes and unreasonably prolonged judicial investigations, constitute serious violations of the right to freedom of association, and reflect Egypt’s broader attempts to stifle independent civil society.

The EIPR, established in 2002, is one of Egypt’s most prominent human rights organizations. Its work to document, and advocate against human rights violations has made it a target for the repressive policies of the Egyptian authorities.

Two years ago, in November 2020, the crackdown on EIPR escalated with the arbitrary [arrest](#) of Mohammed Basheer, the organization’s Administrative Manager, followed by the arrest of Karim Ennarah, the Director of EIPR’s Criminal Justice Unit, and finally that of Gasser Abdel-Razek, EIPR’s former Executive Director. The three men were

arbitrarily detained by the Egyptian security forces and interrogated about a meeting EIPR had held days earlier with diplomats from 13 western countries including the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Canada. International condemnation of their detention led to authorities releasing them after 15 days.

However, the three soon discovered that they were subject to arbitrary travel bans and asset freezes and that investigations into unfounded “terrorism” accusations against them had not been dropped. The EIPR staff under travel bans and asset freezes, which are still in place, [report](#) that these restrictive and arbitrary measures have had a devastating impact on their personal and professional lives, and have led to a range of human rights violations, including of their right to a family life and to work. The lack of a clear legal basis for the travel bans and freezes, and any means to challenge them, underscores their arbitrary nature.

Before his arrest, Karim Ennarah was set to move to London to join his wife, a British filmmaker. Because he cannot leave Egypt, and she cannot move there because of her work, the ban has forced them to live apart, violating their right to a family life. An Egypt-based university and a number of other organizations have retracted job offers they made to Ennarah, because they would not or could not pay him outside of the Egyptian banking system. Gasser Abdel-Razek was passed over for a senior post with a major international organization after they learned he was a “terror suspect” in an open-ended criminal case, in violation of his right to work. The asset freeze even prevented him from renewing the licence for his car. Meanwhile, Mohammed Basheer’s asset freeze means he is unable to access his life savings in order to pay for his children’s university education.

One of the most difficult aspects for those affected by the bans is their open-ended nature and their inability to challenge them in front of a competent, independent and impartial judicial body. Despite multiple requests, the three men have yet to be given a hearing to appeal the asset freezes, and the courts have refused to grant them an appeal against their travel bans. They live with the constant risk of re-arrest, which, in turn, threatens their ability to carry out independent civic and human rights work.

EIPR’s founder and current Executive Director, Hossam Bahgat, has also been under a travel ban for seven years and an asset freeze since 2016, while one of the organization’s researchers, Patrick Zaki, has been banned from travel since his release from prison in December 2021, after 22 months of arbitrary detention. Zaki is a graduate student at the University of Bologna, and the ban has severely disrupted his studies and professional commitments in Italy. He is also currently standing trial before the Emergency State Security Court on a bogus charge of “disseminating false news”.

Travel bans have effectively sidelined members of EIPR and at least 14 directors or staff of other Egyptian civil society organizations, who had previously been able to engage regularly with policymakers outside Egypt, including officials at the United Nations. The holding of COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh provided a rare opportunity for Egyptian human rights defenders, including Hossam Bahgat, to share their perspectives with a broad range of international actors, highlighting the importance of such interactions.

Two years ago, your governments were part of efforts to secure the release of EIPR staff, after their meeting with western diplomats which appeared to trigger their arrests. The effects of those arrests are still being felt. We are

asking that your governments publicly demonstrate support for civil society and free expression in Egypt, and we call on you to use your influence, including at the UN Human Rights Council, to urge the Egyptian authorities to:

- Unconditionally lift all restrictive and arbitrary measures imposed on EIPR staff;
- Unconditionally lift travel bans, asset freezes and criminal charges imposed on human rights defenders, as part of case 173 and other cases, which are plainly designed to hinder the work of members of civil society; and
- End the practice of imposing arbitrary travel bans and assets freezes.

Signatories:

Access Now

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Amnesty International

Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

Canadian Civil Liberties Association

Committee for Justice (CFJ)

Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)

Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)

EgyptWide for Human Rights

El Nadeem Center against Violence and Torture

FairSquare

FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Freedom Initiative

HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement

INCLO

International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Liberty

MENA Rights Group

Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

REDRESS

Sinai Foundation For Human Rights

Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders