

Egypt: country in throes of 'human rights crisis' ahead of COP27 - new report



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Government-led 'National Human Rights Strategy' being used to deflect international criticism

Alaa Abdel Fattah's sister Mona Seif tells Amnesty: 'No strategy will protect our right to freedom of expression'

'President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi must acknowledge the depth of the human rights crisis' - Agnès Callamard

With Egypt set to host the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) in November, Amnesty International has said the country is in the throes of a "human rights crisis" as it published a new report today on the continuing crackdown under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Environmental and human rights groups have raised concerns about limiting protests to "designated areas" at COP27 and the ability of the Egyptian civil society to meaningfully participate without fear of reprisals.

In the 49-page report - 'Disconnected from Reality': Egypt's National Human Rights Strategy covers up human rights crisis - Amnesty shows how the Egyptian authorities have used a "National Human Rights Strategy" - launched a year ago - as a PR tool to deflect attention from its real human rights record. Since the launch of the strategy, the Egyptian authorities have repeatedly referred to it in public and in private meetings with other governments as evidence of their commitment to human rights.

The five-year strategy was drafted by the Government without consulting independent human rights organisations or the

Egyptian public, and presents a deeply misleading picture of the country's human rights crisis, absolving the authorities of responsibility by blaming security threats, economic challenges and Egyptian citizens themselves for "failing to understand" and exercise their rights.

The strategy ignores the fact that thousands of people in Egypt are arbitrarily detained or unjustly prosecuted. In the past two years alone, dozens have died in prison following the deliberate denial of healthcare and being held in cruel and inhuman conditions. Instead, the strategy lauds Egypt's constitutional and legal framework, ignoring the introduction of a series of repressive laws criminalising or severely restricting the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

In recent months, in a positive but very limited step, dozens of prisoners of conscience and others held for political reasons have been released from jail in Egypt. However, the authorities continue to arbitrarily arrest scores of other critics and opponents, while many of those released are banned from travelling. Since 2013, the authorities have also censored hundreds of websites, raided and closed independent media outlets, and detained dozens of journalists for expressing critical views or simply doing their jobs.

Amnesty has welcomed some of the National Human Rights Strategy's modest recommendations, presented as "target results", including the review of crimes punishable by the death penalty, alternatives to pretrial detention and the introduction of comprehensive legislation to combat violence against women. However, the "target results" don't begin to address the scale of the human rights and impunity crisis in the country.

The prominent human rights activist Mona Seif, whose brother Alaa Abdel Fattah has been arbitrarily imprisoned for the majority of President Sisi's rule and is currently on a punishing long-term hunger strike, told Amnesty:

Another case highlighted by Amnesty's report is that of Mohamed Baker, founder and director of the Adalah Centre for

Rights and Freedoms, who has been arbitrarily detained for almost three years. In November 2021, he was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of “spreading false news” in relation to social media posts and reports by his human rights organisation on detention conditions and the death penalty in Egypt.

“The Egyptian authorities have created the National Human Rights Strategy as a shiny cover-up to their unrelenting violations of human rights, thinking they would fool the world ahead of COP27. “The grim reality of their notorious human rights record cannot be rebranded in a PR stunt. “The international community must not be deceived by Egypt’s attempts to conceal the magnitude of the human rights crisis in the country. “President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi must acknowledge the depth of the human rights crisis, for which his government is responsible, and take concrete action to resolve it.”

Meaningful advancement of human rights in Egypt must start with the authorities releasing the thousands of people arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their human rights. All politically-motivated criminal investigations against human rights defenders must be closed and all travel bans, asset freezes and other restrictions must be lifted. Criminal investigations into crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations committed by the security forces must be initiated, with a view to bringing those responsible to justice. These include unlawful killings of hundreds of protesters and extrajudicial executions, torture and enforced disappearances.

Amnesty’s report is based on extensive documentation of patterns of human rights violations committed in Egypt since President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power, as well as information gathered since the launch of the National Human Rights Strategy from multiple sources, including victims, witnesses, human rights defenders and lawyers. Amnesty also reviewed official documents, audio-visual evidence and reports by UN bodies among others. The findings were shared with the Egyptian authorities on 7 September.

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