



Brussels, 25th September 2019

To the Head of the EU Delegation in Egypt, Ambassador Surkoš

Call for action to ensure that Egypt lifts its travel bans on human rights defenders

Dear Ambassador Surkoš,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, are writing to urge you to do everything in your power to persuade the Egyptian authorities to close case no.173/2011 and lift all travel bans arbitrarily imposed on Egyptian activists and human rights defenders (HRDs), so that they can freely and safely participate in the upcoming Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Egypt at the UN Human Rights Council.

The UPR process beginning in November 2019 brings a unique opportunity for the international community to scrutinize Egypt's human rights record and put forward recommendations for improvement. **Full, free and genuine participation by Egypt's independent rights NGOs and defenders based in-country must be essential to this process; its legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness would otherwise be seriously undermined.**

As highlighted in the European Parliament's urgency resolution on Egypt of 13 December 2018ⁱ, many rights activists are subject to repressive measures, some in reprisal for participating in Egypt's 2014 UPR. 10 HRDs and 7 NGOs named in the infamous case 173/2011 (the "Foreign Funding Case"ⁱⁱ) have suffered asphyxiating asset freezes. Travel bans remain imposed on at least 31 defenders and staff of independent Egyptian rights NGOs within case 173, though 43 staff of foreign CSOs convicted in 2013 in the same case, have since been acquitted. This is part of a larger crackdown on civil society and fundamental democratic rights in Egypt, notably on freedoms of expression, of association and assembly, political pluralism and the rule of law.

Under Al-Sisi's presidency, independent NGOs, UN rights experts and other independent monitors have repeatedly documented worrying violence, harassment, intimidation, arrests, enforced disappearances and censorship directed at HRDs, lawyers, peaceful protesters, media workers, trade unionists, political opponents and minorities, perpetrated by Egyptian authorities.. The shocking reprisals against those who engaged with the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing during her latest visit to Egyptⁱⁱⁱ are emblematic of the authorities' refusal of independent scrutiny and criticism. These violations and other practices raised by the European Parliament in its December 2018 resolution—sadly without a positive response—shed serious doubts on the Egyptian government's stated commitment in the 2017-20 EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities to promoting democracy, fundamental freedoms and human rights^{iv}.

Having regard to EU guidelines on human rights defenders^v, we call on you as the EU's highest representative in the country to act resolutely, with the support of the European External Action

Service and in cooperation with EU member states' ambassadors in Cairo, in order **to ensure that Egypt lifts arbitrary travel bans on human rights defenders. They must be allowed to travel freely and safely to Geneva and to engage with the UN bodies without any fear of reprisals for themselves or their families.**

Yours sincerely,

Pierfrancesco Majorino, Abir Al-Sahlani, Margrete Auken, Pietro Bartolo, Brando Benifei, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Saskia Bricmont, Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Anna Cavazzini, Ellie Chowns, Katalin Cseh, Clare Daly, Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, Fredrick Federley, Martin Horwood, Jackie Jones, Karin Karlsbro, Dietmar Köster, Marisa Matias, Karen Melchior, Alessandra Moretti, Javier Nart, Hannah Neumann, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Giuliano Pisapia, Sheila Ritchie, Franco Roberti, María Eugenia Rodríguez Palop, Isabel Santos, Mounir Satouri, Helmut Scholz, Tineke Strik, Patrizia Toia, Marie Toussaint, Miguel Urbán Crespo, Ernest Urtasun, Idoia Villanueva Ruiz, Irina von Wiese

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CC:

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ⁱ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0526_EN.pdf

ⁱⁱ In the second phase of the politically-motivated criminal case no.173/2011, prominent Egyptian HRDs and NGOs could incur sentences of up to 25 years in prison if tried and convicted; the rights groups could see their assets seized by the State. [Though defendants in case 173's first phase targeting foreign CSOs were acquitted in 2018](#), the part of the case against Egyptian CSOs has not been formally closed. 14 Egyptian HRDs are [challenging the related travel bans in court](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23971&LangID=E>

^{iv} <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23942/eu-egypt.pdf>

^v https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_guidelines_hrd_en.pdf