

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Egypt: increased repression against human rights defenders

Paris-Geneva, October 28, 2014 – The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), deplores the sentence against Ms. Yara Sallam, Transitional Justice Officer at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), Ms. Sanaa Seif, a member of the “No to Military Trials for Civilians” movement and sister of the blogger Mr. Alaa Abdel Fattah, and 21 other co-defendants to three years in prison for allegedly “participating in a peaceful march”. The Observatory is also deeply concerned about the unlawful re-arrest of Mr. Alaa Abdel-Fattah, civil and political rights activist, blogger and member of the “No to Military Trials for Civilians” movement.

On October 26, 2014, Ms. **Yara Sallam** and Ms. **Sanaa Seif**, who have been held in pre-trial detention since their arrest on June 21 without grounds or justification, were sentenced along 21 other protesters to three years in prison, an additional three years of police surveillance, a 10,000 EGP fine (1,000 euros), and repayment for property damages they allegedly caused. They were sentenced on charges of breaching the protest law, and for other trumped-up charges such as damaging property and “displaying force”. The charges relate to a demonstration on June 21, 2014 against the repressive anti-protest law (Law 107/2013), which was forcibly dispersed by security forces aided by unknown assailants in civilian attire.

This sentence came a day before an Egyptian court ordered prominent activist **Alaa Abdel-Fattah** back to jail at the start of his retrial along with 24 other individuals. On October 27, 2014, the judge ordered the detention of all those present and postponed the trial to November 11. While all present defendants were transferred to Tora prison, Alaa Abdel-Fattah's whereabouts remain unknown.

Mr. Abdel-Fattah was convicted on June 11 along with 24 individuals on charges including organising an unauthorised demonstration in November 2013 and allegedly assaulting a police officer. He was sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison, a fine of LE 100,000 (approximately EUR 10,420) and five-years of police surveillance. On September 15th, the judge presiding over the retrial stepped down at the request of defence lawyers, a retrial was ordered, and Mr. Abdel-Fattah and 2 others were released on bail after more than three months imprisonment.

In both cases, the charges were largely based on the draconian protest law that infringes on Egyptians' constitutional right to freedom of assembly and expression, as well as Egypt's international legal obligations. These decisions come amid escalating measures by the government that are effectively shutting down democratic means for citizens to voice any grievances.

In recent months, trials of human rights defenders, peaceful protesters and journalists have been marred by absolute disregard for due process rights and reliance on dubious evidence – frequently limited to police or other security services' reports.

Such ongoing judicial harassment and arbitrary detention is one more evidence of the continued criminalisation of human rights defenders' activities in Egypt.

The Observatory fears that all those convicted or detained these past few days were targeted solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly, and their detention and sentencing only aim to sanction their legitimate human rights activities.

Accordingly, the Observatory calls on the authorities to drop all charges held against them, and immediately and unconditionally release them, in compliance with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Egypt.

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