

Egypt Must Pardon or Dismiss Charges

Against Detained and Imprisoned Women Human
Rights Defenders



Introduction

As a result of increasing state repression and the closure of civic and political space, Egypt is now one of the leading countries in the region in terms of high number of political prisoners. The wrath of the state has not spared women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Egypt, as many are imprisoned or perpetually detained on a temporary basis. Some of the women human rights defenders have been in prison for over 5 years, simply for their efforts and activities in support of human rights. Most of the WHRDs currently serving prison sentences have been arrested on arbitrary charges such as terrorism or spreading false information. According to reports, some WHRDs have had a difficult time in detention and have experienced violation of their rights since their arrests, including being subjected to violence by other inmates or serious health complications with no access to health professionals with the expertise to treat them. Alarmingly, most of those WHRDs are in pre-trial detention and their detentions have repeatedly been renewed, and for some their terms of temporary detention has exceeded the maximum legal period of pre-trial detention.

Over the last few months, Egyptian authorities began the process of releasing political prisoners on Presidential pardons. Femena welcomes the release of Egyptian rights defenders as part of presidential pardons, however, Femena is concerned about the absence of women human rights defenders from the two most recent lists of political prisoners in Egypt who received presidential pardons.



Despite the high numbers of WHRDs in detention or serving prison terms, the two most recent groups of presidential pardons on July 19th and August 7th, 2023, did not include any women human rights defenders. This exclusion is alarming and indicates a lack of a gender perspective and potentially systematic discrimination against women human rights defenders by the judiciary and prison systems.

Femena calls on Egyptian authorities to unconditionally release all detained and imprisoned WHRDs, and end judicial proceedings against them. At a minimum these WHRDs should benefit from Presidential pardons, and be released. No one deserves to be imprisoned for defending and promoting rights.

In this report, Femena has highlighted some of the cases of WHRDs currently detained or serving prison terms in Egypt, with the aim of raising their profiles and increasing international pressure on Egyptian authorities to release imprisoned WHRDs and end their systematic harassment of rights defenders and civil society groups.

Marwa Arafa

is a freelance translator and a mother. Prior to her arrest, Marwa provided humanitarian support to families in need whose heads of household and main breadwinners had been arbitrarily arrested. On April 20th, 2020, plainclothes police officers and five men in police uniforms arrested Marwa while she was at her friend's home. Police took her to an unknown place without providing an arrest warrant or justifying the reason for the arrest in front of her baby daughter and family. Marwa was forcibly disappeared for 14 days. Despite her family and lawyer's efforts to determine her whereabouts, Marwa remained disappeared until she was brought to the State Security Prosecution on May 4th, 2020, to be interrogated in case NO. 570/2020. The State Security Prosecution ordered the pre-trial detention of Marwa Arafa based on a charge of joining a terrorist group.

Since then, she has been in pre-trial detention at Al Qanater prison. In February 2021, the prison administration moved her to a different cell, where she was forced to sleep on a cold bare floor, which caused her severe back pain. On May 9th, 2022, the Cairo Criminal Court renewed Marwa's detention, although she has exceeded the maximum limit of pretrial detention (2 years) set in Egyptian law, without providing reasons to justify the extension. Her detention was renewed again on August 13th, 2023 for a period of 45 days pending investigations. In addition, Marwa is denied the right to raise her five year old daughter now.



Hoda Abdel Moneim

is a human rights lawyer who worked on documenting human rights abuses, including incidents of enforced disappearance. She formerly served on Egypt's National Council for Human Rights in 2012-2013. She was a spokesperson for the Women's Revolutionary Coalition of Egypt. Hoda was arrested at her house in the middle of the night on November 1st, 2018, without being informed of the reasons for her arrest. She was blindfolded and put in a police vehicle, and the authorities did not inform her family of where she was taken. She appeared again on November 21st at the Supreme State Security Prosecution in New Cairo after almost three weeks of forced disappearance. She was added to case 1552/2018 in which she faces charges of joining and funding a terrorist organization and incitement to harm the national economy. Cairo's criminal court has continuously renewed her pre-trial detention for 45 days at a time. Her health has seriously degraded.

Hoda is in urgent need of medical care to address her heart disease, but the prison authorities refuse to transfer her to an external hospital. The State Security Court issued an emergency verdict on March 5th, sentencing her to imprisonment and five years of surveillance. In June 2023, Hoda was transferred to the Tenth of Ramadan prison, and the visitation ban remains in place. In the last week of August 2023, her family was finally able to visit her.





Aisha Alshater

is a human rights and political activist, arrested on November 1st, 2018. Aisha was arrested at her home and forcibly disappeared for 20 days, during which she was severely beaten and subjected to electric shocks. She is accused of joining a banned group and receiving financing for terrorist purposes. Aisha is being held in Al-Qanater Women's Prison in prolonged solitary confinement in a small, poorly ventilated cell, without a toilet, and is only allowed to leave twice a day – for less than 30 minutes – to use the bathroom. The prison administration also prevents Aisha from receiving family visits and communicating with her family and her lawyer while in prison. Aisha suffers from aplastic anemia, a rare and serious condition that affects the blood. Her health deteriorated rapidly, and during her imprisonment, she was exposed to health problems in the spinal cord. She needs specialized treatment, which is not available at Al-Qanater Prison hospital. This is what she and her lawyer stated during her trial sessions. The Public Prosecution interrogated Aisha in Case No. 1552 of 2018, Supreme State Security, and her detention continued for more than two years. On August 23rd, 2021, the Supreme State Security Prosecution referred Aisha to trial before the Emergency State Security Criminal Court, pending case 1552 of 2018, State Security, and the prosecution charged her with the above-mentioned accusations. The court sentenced Aisha to ten years in prison on March 5th, 2023.

Hassiba Mahsoub

Is an Egyptian businesswoman, who has not been politically active. She is the sister of the former minister, Mohamed Mahsoub. She was arrested in Alexandria in December 2019 and subjected to enforced disappearance for 67 days in an illegal detention facility. She was presented to the Supreme State Security Prosecution and included in Case 1530, which was known in the media as “The Joker” case. The prosecution charged Hassiba with joining a banned group, promoting its ideas, and spreading false news and statements, before she was transferred to Qanater Prison.

A year later, she was released "for 11 hours," and then she was included in another case (No. 955). In this case, Hassiba was charged with joining a terrorist group and spreading false news. Hassiba suffers from severe high blood pressure and uterine tumors. She suffers from severe bleeding that caused her to lose a lot of weight while in prison. She is now placed in a cell with female prisoners convicted of drug trafficking.



Hala Fahmy

Is a journalist and senior TV presenter with the rank of general manager at Egyptian state television. On April 24th, 2022, Hala was arrested after she posted a live video explaining that anonymous individuals nearby Nozha Police Station chased her down and plain clothes security forces stormed her home while she was not present. The charges against Hala include joining a terrorist group, incitement to commit a terrorist crime, and spreading false news domestically and abroad. Hala was targeted by security forces after posting several videos about the Egyptian economy, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) crisis, and Emirati investments in Egypt. On May 17th, 2022, she announced that she was starting a hunger strike to object to the severe conditions of her detention. The Supreme State Security Prosecution extended Hala's detention for 150 days before referring her to the Criminal Court, which renewed her pre-trial detention in connection with Case No. 441 of 2022 (Supreme State Security).

She remains in arbitrary pre-trial detention until the present. In April 2023, lawyer Mahinour El-Masry explained that after meeting with Hala Fahmy in Badr Prison, she was convinced that Hala's life in detention was in danger due to verbal and physical assaults by fellow inmates. On Sunday, July 9th, 2023, the criminal court decided to renew the detention. During the session, Hala proved before the judge that she has been subjected to physical assault and death threats. Her detention was renewed during the third week of August 2023 for a period of 45 days pending investigations.



Manal Agrama

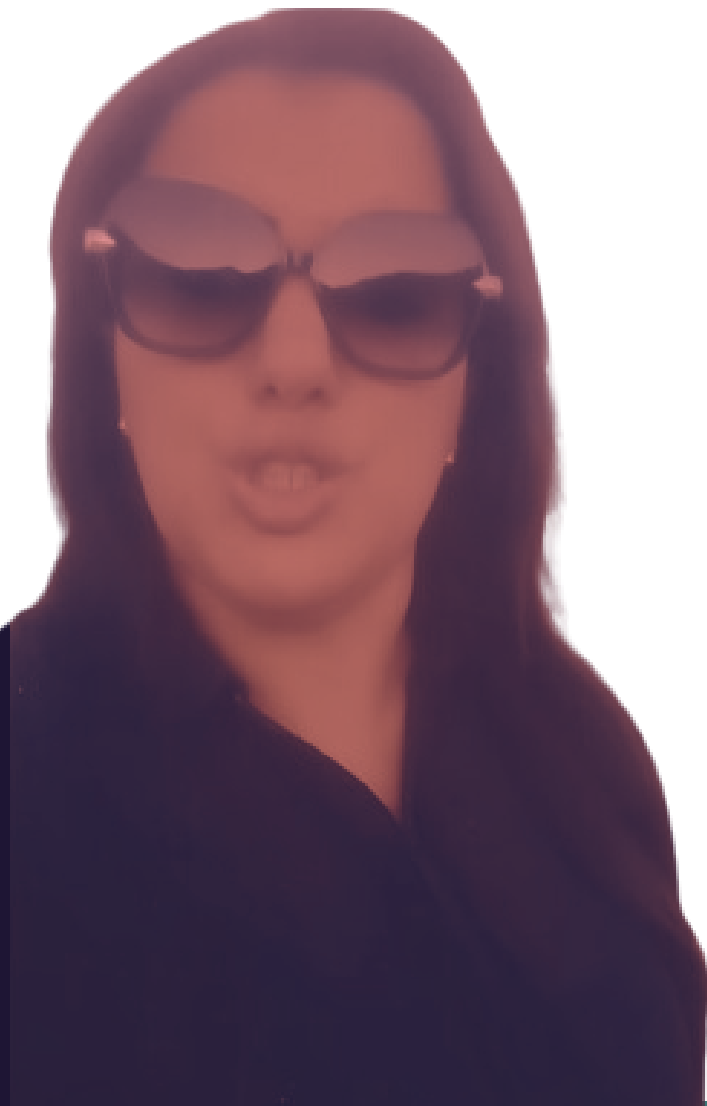
is a journalist and former deputy editor-in-chief of the Radio and Television Magazine. On November 1st, 2022, the Security forces arrested Manal in her house in the fifth settlement district. She is charged with joining and financing a terrorist group, inciting a terrorist act, participating in a criminal agreement aimed at committing a terrorist act, and using social media to promote a terrorist act, in connection with case No. 1893 of 2022.

Manal suffers from health problems in her spine and the deterioration of her health due to her detention. On February 10th of the previous year, her father passed away while she was inside the prison.



Nermeen Hussien

is a human rights defender. In August 2018, the security forces arrested Nermeen, along with other rights defenders. She was held in solitary confinement for 6 months, as part of case 440 of 2018. Nermeen was released in May 2019 but was rearrested in March 2020. Nermeen Hussain remains in prison.



Donia Samir Fathy

is a journalist in south Sinai governorate. She has 4 children. Donia posted a video on Facebook revealing that she had been harassed by South Sinai Governor Khaled Fouda. Donia was arrested on May 29th, 2022, and her detention has been renewed since then as part of Case No. 440 of 2022.



Femena supports Women Human Rights Defenders, their organizations and feminist movements in Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) through analysis of trends and policy, documentation, fostering the development of regional communities of practice and advocacy.

Femena's work is primarily focused on contexts of shrinking or closed civic space and contexts complicated by growing extremism and conflict.

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