



EuroMed Rights – Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
EuroMed Droits – Réseau euro-méditerranéen des droits humains
الأورو-متوسطية لحقوق الإنسان - الشبكة الأوروبية المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان



JOINT STATEMENT: El Nadim Center must not be silenced

As increasing numbers of cases of torture, deaths in detention and forced disappearances are being reported in Egypt, some gaining international media attention, the Egyptian authorities have taken measures to shut down the renowned El Nadim Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture, a key source of information on the issues of torture, deaths in detention and impunity for these crimes in Egypt. This move clearly represents another step in the ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders in Egypt.

On 17 February 2016, a police delegation sent by local authorities entered the center's premises in central Cairo and presented an order of administrative closure "for breaching license conditions," referring to Law 453/1954 on the registration of businesses and shops, but based on a decision from the Health Ministry. No explanation was provided as to the grounds of this decision. The lawyer representing El Nadim Center convinced the authorities to postpone the execution of the closure order until 22 February.

On 21 February, several members of El Nadim visited the Ministry of Health to inquire about these alleged breaches. They were told that the closure order was final and that the decision was based on the fact that El Nadim conducted activities beyond their mandate, such as the publication of torture reports. El Nadim's request for a postponement of the closure until their medical activities could be disengaged from their human rights advocacy work was denied. Meanwhile, El Nadim filed an urgent motion to the Administrative Court to suspend the implementation of the closure order.

The undersigned organisations believe that these developments confirm that the center is being targeted for its human rights activities. The main aim of the closure order is clearly to suppress a key source of information on the issues of torture, deaths in detention and impunity for such crimes in Egypt.

Since its establishment in 1993, El Nadim Center has been committed to combating violence, torture and injustice by providing psychological support and therapy to victims of torture and violence against women, and calls for the provision of medical care to persons in detention. El Nadim Center enjoys a well-deserved reputation of expertise in this field as the leading organisation providing care and support to torture victims in Egypt, as well as for its documentation work. Indeed, it is the only organisation that systematically compiles total figures of cases of torture, denial of medical care and deaths in detention, among other human rights violations.

In the past months, dozens of prominent human rights defenders have been harassed, arrested, investigated or detained, in a clear attempt to terrorize and silence Egypt's vibrant civil society. The ongoing harassment against Egyptian civil society is hindering any genuine process of democratisation, in which civil society organisations play an indispensable role. This closure order appears to be another attack on freedom of association, as underlined by Kamal Abbas, member of the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights, on 18 February.¹

The closure of El Nadim Center would constitute an unprecedented violation of the right to

¹ His interview with Al Bedaya is published here <http://albedayah.com/news/2016/02/18/107291>

freedoms of association and of expression, as well as a dramatic threat to civil liberties, with thousands of political prisoners behind bars, all virtually threatened with systematised acts of torture. El Nadim Center must not be silenced.

We call upon the Egyptian authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally withdraw the order of administrative closure issued against El Nadim Center, as it clearly only aims at sanctioning its legitimate human rights work;
- Immediately and unconditionally put an end to harassment of Egyptian human rights defenders and civil society organisations, including at the judicial level;
- Repeal all national legislation that hinders freedoms of association, assembly and expression, in order to bring it in line with Egypt's Constitution, and with the international and regional instruments it has ratified.

Signatory organisations:

Arci

EuroMed Rights

Front Line Defenders

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

Relieve

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