

EGYPT MUST STOP HOMOPHOBIC PERSECUTION

The Egyptian authorities have detained at least 57 people for their perceived sexual orientation, following the display of the rainbow flag at a concert in Cairo on 22 September.

Egyptian security forces detained at least 57 people for their perceived sexual orientation following the display of the rainbow flag at a Mashrou' Leila concert in Cairo on 22 September. The authorities have carried out at least five forced anal examinations of those arrested, which contravene the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under international law. The security forces located two people who had allegedly raised the flag at the concert, and arrested people, unrelated to the flag incident, from different districts in Cairo, Ismalia, Damietta and Sharm al-Sheikh based on their perceived sexual orientation. They also used entrapment through online dating applications to locate people to arrest. In the week following the concert, at least nine men were sentenced to between one and six years' imprisonment, and another 35 are facing expedited prosecutions.

Among those currently being questioned is one woman, Sara Hegazy. There are another 11 detained people in different places in Cairo pending prosecutor investigation.

At least 55 of the detained people face charges that include "habitual debauchery," "inciting debauchery", and "promoting sexual deviance". Sara Hegazy and another man have received the same charges in addition to "belonging to a banned group". These charges can carry prison sentences of up to 15 years under the penal code and the law on prostitution. Sara Hegazy told the prosecutor who questioned her that she was beaten and sexually harassed by her cell mates in the Saida Zenab police station in Cairo after the security forces there informed her cellmates that she was charged with "habitual debauchery."

Anyone who is detained solely because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity is a prisoner of conscience.

Please send a fax or letter without delay. (Postage is \$2.50.)

- * Urge the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those detained based on their real or perceived sexual orientation, to quash all sentences and drop all charges against them, and to stop any further arrests.
- * Call on them to immediately halt forced anal examinations which amount to torture or other ill-treatment, and order a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into the examinations that have already taken place.
- * Urge them to protect Sara Hegazy from torture and ill-treatment and bring those responsible to justice.

Here is the contact information you need:

Minister of Interior

Magdy Abdel Ghaffar

Ministry of Interior

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Salutation: Dear Minister

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

Office of the President

Al Ittihadia Palace

Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

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Salutation: Your Excellency

Please send a copy to

His Excellency Moataz Mounir Zahran

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Additional information

The incident of displaying the rainbow flag at the concert provoked a public outcry from local media that called for those involved in displaying the flag to be brought to justice. Following the smear campaign from local media, Egypt's public prosecutor announced an investigation into the promotion of "habitual debauchery" and "homosexuality" on 25 September. He further ordered state security prosecutors to open investigations against those who raised the flag.

The Supreme Media Council also issued a statement banning all media outlets from showing support, solidarity or sympathy to the LGBTI people and called on all media outlets to raise awareness against the "habitual debauchery" and LGBTI people, who it described "do not fit in the Egyptian society traditions or culture" and that "this LGBTI phenomenon must come to an end".

Lawyers and NGOs in Egypt told Amnesty International that the numbers of detained people could be higher, but that they are not able to follow up on all the arrests because they are becoming widespread.

This is the worst campaign of state-sanctioned homophobia in Egypt's recent history but is not an isolated incident, as it is similar to the mass arrest of 52 people following a raid on the Queen Boat, a floating nightclub on the Nile, in 2001 which led to the conviction of 23 men. Over the past four years and before the events of the past week, the police had arrested over 250 men for their perceived sexual orientation and prosecutors had brought them to trial, according to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights which has been tracking these trials.