



**Second Quarterly Report on the Situation of Freedom of Expression in Egypt  
April – June 2019**

# Quarterly Report on the State of Freedom of Expression in Egypt Second Quarter (April - June 2019)

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## Methodology

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The report presents and analysis some topics related to the right to freedom of expression and the free flow of information. It aims at assessing the general policies of state institutions towards the right to freedom of expression and free flow of information. The report also relied on the presentation and analysis of the violations documented in accordance with the association's monitoring and documentation methodology. Violations were documented in the period from 26 March to 25 June, 2019.

## Introduction

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The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) issues its second quarterly report for the year 2019, which addresses the state of freedom of expression and the free flow of information in Egypt. The report is based on an analysis of the political context and the most prominent issues affecting freedom of expression. The current authority passed constitutional amendments allowing President Sisi to remain in power until 2030. It also launched a crackdown on activists from secular opposition parties to prevent declaring an alliance between these parties aiming at participating in the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2020.

In addition, the Egyptian Media Group has continued its efforts to strengthen its control over the ownership of the media, through its increased cooperation with the National Media Authority, a public institution that runs state-owned media. The General Intelligence, along with a group of businessmen who support the current authority, shares in the ownership of the Egyptian media group.

These practices indicate that the current authority continues to deprive Egyptian citizens of the right to freedom of expression, which is discussed in the second part of the report, with respect to the state of freedom of information, digital rights and freedom of creativity. We witness that internet censorship practices are continuing, as are security interventions aimed at preventing the printing of newspapers or preventing the publication of articles, in addition to continuing security pursuits of activists, creators, journalists and users of social media. This calls for solidarity with victims of violations of freedom of expression.

In the third section, the report makes several recommendations that can be addressed to the Egyptian authorities by human rights defenders. These recommendations, together with recommendations issued in the previous periodic reports of AFTE, would contribute to halting the deterioration of freedom of expression and reducing the risks which Egyptian citizens are exposed to as a result of expressing their opinions.

## First: A reading into the state of freedom of expression

The first section of the report examines the political climate affecting freedom of expression issues. It also focuses on specific policy issues in the freedom of expression files during the second quarter of 2019. Hence, the contexts in which the right to freedom of expression and free flow of information are violated could be explained. The report begins by analyzing the implications of the adoption of the constitutional amendments that allow President Sisi to continue in office until 2030. It should be noted that the report shows, in its second section, the violations that accompanied the referendum on the constitutional amendments.

### • **After the amendment of the constitution: A crackdown on secular parties before the declaration of the “Alliance of Hope” for the parliamentary elections 2020**

The National Elections Authority announced the result of the referendum on the amendment of some articles of the Constitution, on April 23, 2019. The constitutional amendments passed by 88.83% of the valid votes, while 11.17% voted “No”. The turnout of voters was 44.33%. With this result, President Sisi ensured that he could continue to rule until 2030, as the article that obliged him not to run for office after the end of his second term in 2020, was amended.

The constitutional amendments included several articles, notably those relating to the term of the presidency. The term of the presidency became 6 years instead of 4 years and remained conditional on running for only for two terms. However, article (241 bis) states that President Sisi will remain in office for six years, starting with the date of his election as president in 2018. This means that Sisi can re-run for presidency in 2024, allowing him to remain in office until 2030.

On the other hand, the constitutional amendments included the articles regulating the House of Representatives. Twenty-five percent of the parliamentary seats were allocated to women. The constitutional amendments also introduced the establishment of the Senate, which advises the House of Representatives and the President. Two thirds of its members are elected, one-third of the members are appointed by the president, provided that the number of Senate members is 180, at least.

Regarding the impact of the constitutional amendments on the conduct of elections, the next presidential election is now due in 2024. Moreover, the House of Representatives must pass a law

on the organization of its elections, and another law on the Senate's elections. This is especially important since the House of Representatives must hold its elections at the end of 2020, and there are proposals from its members to hold Senate elections at the end of 2019.

It could be said that the current authority succeeded in ensuring that President Sisi won the 2018 presidential elections by preventing the nomination of two former military commanders. The authority then concentrated its efforts on constitutional amendments through which the presidential elections are postponed to 2024, paving the road for Sisi to stay in power for a longer period. Thus, the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2020 became the last challenge to prevent the opposition from making a change through the elections process, especially as the Senate, introduced by the constitutional amendments, plays an advisory role without real powers.

While a group of secular parties were coordinating the parliamentary elections of 2020, police arrested a number of political activists on June 25, 2018, including Ziad Al Alaimi, a former MP and leading figure in the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, and Hossam Moanis, a leading member in El Karama party and the former campaign manager of presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi. Secular parties, including the Conservative party, and the Reform and Development party, have held several consultative meetings discussing the establishment of an electoral alliance called the "Alliance of Hope". Through this alliance the secular opposition parties and the 25/30 parliamentary block were to prepare a unified program and decide on candidates for the parliamentary elections scheduled in 2020, in order to gain more space for the opposition, whose activity has been restricted since 2013.

The current authority has not only arrested the activists but launched a wide media campaign against secular parties, accusing them of working with the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Egyptian authorities classify as a terrorist group. They were also accused of attempting to destabilize the country, cooperating with foreign countries and receiving foreign funding. These practices against parties established according to the Egyptian laws and working to change through the election process refers to the depth of the political crisis experienced by the country, and the extent of the security apparatus' control of political affairs.

And for the third time, speculations of analysts and politicians on the possibility of a breakthrough in the practice of political activity, proved wrong. There were expectations ahead of the 2018 presidential elections, but the current authority blocked any opportunity for that and launched a campaign against potential candidates and media at that time. There were then expectations of a change of the negative approach towards political activity after President Sisi won the

presidential elections, but instead restrictions of political activity and media increased ahead of the constitutional amendments. Finally, senior politicians thought that after Sisi ensured remaining in office until 2030, there would be an opportunity for the opposition to run for the parliamentary elections of 2020, without restrictions. However, this latest attack on the “Alliance of hope” proved that the current authority is not in the process of changing its restrictive policies regarding political participation and freedom of expression.

This attack on secular parties means that the main orientation of the authority is to prevent the practice of political activity, with the consequent restriction of freedom of expression and the continuation of censorship of media and the internet, and the prosecution of internet users. This is discussed in the second section of the report which addresses freedom of the media, digital rights and freedom of creativity.

### **• Controlling the media: Broadcast of the African Cup of Nations locally and Maspero heritage in the grip of the Egyptian Media Group**

Since its establishment in 2016, the Egyptian Media Group, which is partly owned by the General Intelligence, has concluded a number of acquisition deals of media companies, production companies and advertising agencies. A number of businessmen have become partners in the group’s ownership, namely Tamer Morsi, chairman of the group’s board of directors, Kamel Abu Ali and Mohamed Al Amin.

The Egyptian Media Group is the main tool used by security apparatuses to control the ownership of the media, resulting in the control of ON TV, CBC and Al Hayah networks. In addition to the direct control of ownership, the Egyptian Media Group manages the Nile Radio network owned by the National Media Authority; it also signed a protocol with the National Media Authority to develop a plan for the development of state-owned television.

During the reporting period, the Egyptian Media Group announced its agreement with the National Media Authority to launch “Time Sport” satellite channel to broadcast the 2019 African Cup of Nations, organized by Egypt, hence it has the right to broadcast it on a local scale. There is no information on the deal between the Egyptian media group and the National Media Authority, or on how Egyptian media group was chosen as a partner with state television, especially since the state television has the right of terrestrial broadcasting by virtue of Egypt’s hosting of the tournament.



On the other hand, the Egyptian Media Group dominated the majority of drama production in Ramadan, the most important drama season in Egypt. Through its ownership of Synergy Production Company, major television networks, and an advertising agency, it ensured this domination. Egyptian Media reinforced its control of drama by launching “Watch it”, a platform for screening its drama production online in return for a monthly subscription. This move was not successful, and was criticized by social media users.

As a result of the desire to support “Watch it” platform with new materials, United Media Services Company, which is –according to some reports- the parent company of Egyptian Media Group, announced the signing of a cooperation protocol with the National Media Authority. By virtue of this protocol “Watch it” has the right to stream movies, series and plays produced by Egyptian TV in return for fees from the audience. These works were streamed online via YouTube, which raised concerns that Egyptian Media will monopolize the heritage of Egyptian television, preventing the public from watching it.

The National Media Authority said in response to criticism that “The cooperation protocol signed with the United Media Services Company, the owner of Egyptian Media Group, came within the framework of preserving the artistic content of the Egyptian TV in accordance with the rules and laws. The protocol preserves the full rights of the National Media Authority, both intellectual and financial, in relation to the content which will be made available on the new digital platform “Watch it”. The content will be available exclusively as a right of use and not selling. This content will be streamed using modern technologies suitable for the new global methods of offering content, and maximizing the financial returns to the benefit of the National Media Authority”.

In this case also, Egyptian Media and the National Media Authority did not announce the details of the agreement between them. This raises doubts that Egyptian Media is practicing monopolistic practices with the help of public institutions, whether the General Intelligence that participates in the ownership of the group, or the National Media Authority which owns the rights of terrestrial broadcasting and the rights to display the works it produced.

In previous publications, AFTE addressed the need for the Supreme Council for Media Regulation to monitor the funding of Egyptian Media Group, and to investigate suspicions of monopolistic practices in the ownership of media outlets. The Supreme Council has not announced any action to investigate the practices of Egyptian Media Group until the issuance of this report.

## Second: Presentation and analysis of patterns of violations of freedom of expression:

In its second section, the report examines violations of freedom of expression in details in the following files: freedom of the press and the media, digital rights and freedom of creativity. The report deals with these violations, both in relation to past practices of the current authority and in terms of the impact of the political and legislative context on the pace of violations. The following info graph shows the total number of violations of freedom of expression during the second quarter of 2019, documented by the Monitoring and Documentation Unit of AFTE:

### Violations of Freedom of Expression 2nd quarter (April – June 2019)



#### Freedom of Media

17 incidents including 21 violations

- Physical assaults 2
- Breaking into the headquarters of a website 1
- Seizure of professional and personal belongings 3
- Blocking news websites 1
- Disrupting the printing of a newspaper issue to remove a report 2
- Preventing the printing of a newspaper issue 1
- Prevention of coverage 9
- Travel ban 1
- Stopping a program 1



#### Freedom of Artistic Creativity

3 incidents including 3 violations

- Imprisonment sentences 2
- Prevention of a play 1



#### Freedom of digital expression

5 incidents including 5 violations

- Arrest and pre-trial detention 5

#### Categories of Blocked Websites

- Political websites 7
- Online viewing websites 7
- Press websites 1
- Technical websites 1
- Cinema websites 1

## • Freedom of the press and the media:

During the period covered by the report, AFTE monitored 17 incidents related to media freedom. These included 21 violations against journalists and media professionals; this count does not include articles that were prevented from publishing, according to press reports, because of uncertainty of the information. Violations in the report varied from physical assaults on journalists, breaking into press institutions, stopping programs, preventing newspapers' printing, preventing journalists from coverage, and blocking news websites.

### - Stopping the broadcast of a program:

On March 24, 2019, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation issued a decree stopping the program "Cut off men", which was broadcast on "Al Qahera Wa Al Nas" channel, until the name and content are reviewed. The Council reasoned that the content of the program broadcasts concepts contrary to the values of society includes inappropriate words and phrases that offend public modesty and discriminates against men and degrade them. The decree added that the program is presenting individual cases as a general phenomenon, which threatens the social and religious culture established in Egyptian society in relation to the family, according to the text of the degree.

### - Breaking into the headquarters of Sada El Balad website:

On May 7, 2019, the cinema producer Ahmed Al Sobki and a number of individuals broke into the headquarters of Sada El Balad website in Abdel Moneim Riad street in Mohandeseen, following a dispute between the producer and Sada El Balad channel in relation to one of the TV series shown on the channel.

"The incident began with the entry of Ahmed Al Sobki and a number of people to the headquarters of the website; they then started cursing the personnel. They asked about Ahmed Sami, the director of contracting and advertising marketing for the channel Sada Al Balad, and who is not connected to the site", according to Islam Maklad, journalist in the website, and another journalist who asked to be anonymous.

"The editor in chief of the site, Ahmed Sabri, came out of his office and tried to calm Al Sobki trying to understand what is happening because we did not know or understand the reason

behind their actions. During that, a number of journalists, including the head of “Asl el Hekayah” department, tried filming what was happening with their mobile phones, so one of the persons with Sobki snatched it from him”, the two eyewitnesses added.

The editor in chief, accompanied by Al Sobki, entered his office; the voices were loud again along with curses. “I noticed one of the people accompanying Al Sobki trying to close the door of the editor in chief’s office, after the voices were loud. This pushed me to try entering the office and prevent him from closing it, so Al Sobki walked towards me trying to attack me, but some of the people who were with him rushed and attacked me, and broke some of the contents of the office”, according to Maklad.

The two witnesses said that they contacted the police, so Al Sobki and his companions left. The two witnesses then went to the Dokki police station to file a police report, and there they found Ahmed Al Sobki filing a report against the employees at Sada El Balad website. The editor in chief Ahmed Sabri, journalist Islam Maklad, and the head of “Asl el Hekayah” department, Ahmed Salem, were detained to be referred to the prosecution to investigate the police report Al Sobki filed. The following day, the prosecution released the journalists under guarantee of their place of residence. Ahmed Al Sobki was also released on LE 1000 bail.

#### **- Violations during the voting process on constitutional amendments:**

On April 20, 2019, the editor in chief of Al Mashhad newspaper Magdi Shendi published a statement in which he announced the refusal of the National Elections Authority to grant permits to Al Mashhad journalists without giving any reasons. Shendi added in his statement that Al Mashhad newspaper submitted all the required papers on the official dates, including a letter from the Supreme Council for Media Regulation. In his statement, Shendi said that the journalists of Al Mashhad suffer from the intransigence of a number of official authorities that does not allow them to perform their journalistic work. Shendi confirmed that the head of the National Media Authority, Makram Mohammed Ahmed, promised to intervene, but his efforts failed. According to the statement, the authorities granted by the law to the National Elections Authority do not allow judicial review of its decision, and only allow appealing before the head of the authority itself.

The journalists syndicate received three complaints from journalists: Sahar Al Arabi, Manal Mahran and Ezzedine Abdel Aziz, who worked in the following newspapers: Al Masry Al Youm, El Esbou’, and Al-Ahram, respectively. The complaints included that the journalists were prevented from

covering the voting process in the polling stations of Al Ahli Club, Faculty of Physical Education, School of martyr Abu Shakra in Mokattam, and several polling stations in Aswan Governorate.

The spokesman of the National Elections Authority has announced that the Authority will not allow the media outlets to cover the counting inside the sub-committees as was the case in all the elections and referendums organized after the January 25 revolution. Also the media outlets are not entitled to announce the results of the referendum until the National Elections Authority officially announces them.

### **- Al Ahali newspaper banned from printing:**

On May 28, 2019, Amina Al Nakhash, the editor in chief of Al Ahali newspaper, received a late telephone call from a member of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, telling her that the censor objected to a feature in the issue under print at the time. The two pages feature mentioned that some convicts in cases, described by Al Nakhash in a telephone call, as “cases of violence”, were released by presidential pardon.

The member of the General Secretariat of the Council asked Al Nakhash to remove the feature and replace it so that the newspaper can be printed. El Tagamou’ party, which issues the newspaper, said in a statement that Al Nakhash, after consultation with the editorial board and leadership of the party, refused the request to remove the feature or make any changes in the newspaper, hence printing of the newspaper was suspended. Al Nakhash said: “I refused to remove the feature for several reasons: first is that it was published on two pages, which means it cannot be replaced in this short time. Second, it was based on information from the papers of the case, and not opinionated. Third, the frequency of interventions in our work represents a restriction on the freedom of the media that opens the doors to corrupt people. Finally, there is no legal or constitutional justification for censorship of the press, and therefore all these interventions are illegal”.

This was not the first incident of its kind for Al Ahali newspaper. The censor intervened to amend and remove some of the material in the issues published on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of the same month. In an interview with a researcher at AFTE, Al Nakhash said that the censor asked through a member of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, to remove a news report in the edition issued on Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> of May, which discussed a planned ministerial reshuffle. Al Nakhash added, “I removed the news report after the mediation of the head of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, Makram Mohamed Ahmed, who assured me that the news was not true.”

Al Nakhash went on, “Removing the news report from the paper issue allowed its print”. She added that the censor had intervened and delayed the printing of the edition of May 22<sup>nd</sup>, requesting the deletion of the news report that included corruption accusations of a former minister, who is now the wife of a current banker, based on a briefing request submitted by an MP. The editorial board agreed to remove the news report from the paper issue so it could be printed, after the news was published on the website and on social media platforms.

**- Some Zamalek players attack Al Masry Al Youm’s photographer, Abdel Rahman Gamal:**

On April 23, 2019, following the match between Zamalek and Pyramids in the Egyptian league, a number of Zamalek players and administrators assaulted Al Masry Al Youm’s photo journalist Abdel Rahman Gamal during his coverage of the match. In a testimony published by Al Masry Al Youm website, Abdel Rahman recites the details of the attack: “As soon as the match was over I went to do my work photographing the manifestations of happiness of Pyramids players after winning and also photographing Zamalek players. I noticed the presence of a security cordon in the middle of the stadium and found that some Zamalek players are assaulting a police officer responsible for security, so I went to photograph the incident”. Abdel Rahman added: “I was surprised that Zamalek player, Mohammed Ibrahim, headed towards me and asked me quietly for my phone, which I am using in photographing. He didn’t succeed, so a member of the medical team, named Mohamed Eid, intervened trying to snatch my phone, but he failed and fell to the ground. After that, Mahmoud Ganesh came and beat me on the face, the dressing room worker and player Muhammad Abd Al Ghani also beat me with him”. Abdel Rahman added, “Mohamed Eid asked me to come to the dressing room to give me the phone, but I refused and went to Nasr City police department to file a report of the incident”.

**- Director of Al Alam TV banned from travel:**

On April 11, 2019, security authorities at Cairo airport banned the former director of Al Alam TV channel, Ahmed Al Sioufi, from traveling to the Lebanese capital Beirut without explaining the reasons for the ban. The security authorities also withdrew his passport and asked him to get it back from a national security headquarters.

In an interview over the phone, the former director of Al Alam TV channel told us what happened: “During my trip to the Lebanese capital Beirut and after presenting my passport to the passport officer, I was asked to wait a little, and then a policeman came and took me to a room without any explanation as to what was happening. I kept moving with the policeman from one room to another until a policeman brought me my suitcase telling me I am banned from traveling, without giving any reasons for the ban. He added that I can get back my passport from a national security office. I still have not restored it yet.”

#### **- Blocking Al Tahrir website:**

On May 9, 2019, Al Tahrir institution announced that Al Tahrir newspaper’s website had been disrupted. The statement added that the institution has contacted the company hosting the site servers, which confirmed that the site works efficiently, there is no technical failure and it opens with high efficiency in all countries of the world, while facing technical problems inside Egypt.

The statement said that the institution has contacted all official bodies entrusted with the organization of the work of media institutions and outlets and news websites such as the Supreme Council for Media Regulation and the Journalists Syndicate; they both denied the existence of any decisions concerning Al Tahrir website. On June 23, 2019, Al Tahrir institution issued a statement to its journalists and employees, informing them that it has knocked the doors of all official bodies to inquire about the reason behind the blockade and the entity behind it, but in vain.

The statement added that the institution tried to overcome the blocking crisis technically to mitigate the effects of blocking the site. The statement reiterated that the institution addressed the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, the Journalists Syndicate, the National Telecom Regulatory Authority and the Minister of Communications and Information Technology to find out the reasons for the blocking. They confirmed that the website did not commit any violation that requires blocking it. The institution has contacted the head of the Journalists Syndicate to intervene with the responsible bodies and agencies to solve the problem and prevent its escalation in a way that would affect the interests of its journalists and employees. The head of the Syndicate informed the publisher that all entities confirm the absence of any professional error or violation.

The statement said that the institution remained committed to the employee’s rights. However, it stated that the management of the institution had to take a decision because of the coercive circumstances beyond its will; it will stop paying its obligations to employees two months after the date of publication of the statement. The institution will incur the expenses of the two months

in consideration of the circumstances of the employees and in response to the request of the publisher and the editor in chief who asked the management to wait may be the website will return to work.

**- Continued prevention from coverage:**

On May 24, 2019, Sayed Hassan, a photo journalist with Vito website, published, on his Facebook page, his testimony of what he was exposed to in Zamalek club during filming the distribution of the tickets for the Confederation Cup finals between the Egyptian Zamalek and the Moroccan Nahdet Borkane. He mentioned that during his coverage of the event, the video cameraman of the club's chairman Mortada Mansour asked him to leave the club and to show his ID, but he refused.

Hassan added, "He pushed me and send a security personal to get me out of the club. I told the security personal that I am a photojournalist, he asked me for an ID and was speaking very politely, he saw the ID and walked two steps but the video photographer said: is this person back again, and he pushed me saying: go out. So, I pushed him and said I am not going out. He said lets go to the chancellor (he means Mortada Mansour), putting his hand on my shoulder. I pushed his hand down and told him don't touch me. We went to Mortada, and while I was just introducing myself to him and showing him my ID, he snatched it from me and put it in his pocket and told them: take him out and they started pushing me to the extent that my watch broke, and they kicked me out". Hassan told a researcher at AFTE that until the moment, he did not receive his own ID, and that the website will print a new ID for him.

On May 9, 2019, officials of Zamalek club prevented photo journalists from covering the match between Zamalek and Wadi Degla, because of the photographers' solidarity with their colleague Al Masry Al Youm's photographer who was attacked by some Zamalek players after the match between Zamalek and Pyramids in the Egyptian league. The photo journalists had refused to take photos of the Zamalek team during the opening of the match between Zamalek and Al Negm Al Sahli in the semi-final of the Confederation Cup. They put the cameras on the ground in solidarity with their colleague, which prompted Zamalek officials to prevent photographers from covering the club's match with Wadi Degla.

On May 1, 2019, the Wafd Portal, said that its correspondent in the Red Sea, Ashraf Mohie, was prevented from covering the visit of the Minister of Youth and Sports to Hurghada. The journalist told the website that some of the so-called men of the minister prevented him from filming and recording with any of the attendees, and asked the security to examine his identity and prevent him from entering to cover the visit.



On May 25, 2019, the Cairo Criminal Court prevented journalists and photographers from attending the trial of the former deputy governor of Alexandria, Soad Al Khouli, on charges of money laundering. The hearing was held in the deliberation room.

On May 29, 2019, Ahmed Megahed, a member of the board of directors of the football federation, prevented Time Sports channel's team from entering the air defense stadium to cover preparations for hosting the African Cup of Nations in Egypt, despite receiving all necessary permits, according to a statement by the National Media Authority.

**- Mahmoud Hussein: Release and then imprisonment pending another case:**

On May 25, 2019, the Criminal Court upheld the decision to release Al Jazeera journalist Mahmoud Hussein on precautionary measures. The release verdict was issued on May 23 after more than two years imprisonment pending the State Security Case No. 11152 of 2016, in which Hussein was accused of publishing false news about the situation in Egypt and the creation of false media scenes and reports. However, the Jazeera journalist was not released and was held in custody pending State Security Case 1360 for the year 2018. We could not confirm the charges against him until the issuance of this report.

**- Banning of opinion articles:**

In May 2019 news circulated that two articles by journalist Mohamed Saad Abdel Hafiz were banned from publishing in Al Shorouq newspaper. The articles were titled: "Freedom of the press and the carob drink" and "Blank". When we contacted Abdel Hafiz he refused to comment on the matter. In the same context, Amr Badr, member of the Journalists Syndicate board, confirmed on his Facebook page, the banning of an article by journalist Abdul Azim Hammad, while an article by journalist Abdullah Al Senawi, was banned for the second time in a row. AFTE contacted Hammad, who in turn denied that any of his articles was banned during that period, and AFTE was unable to contact Al Senawi to verify the news.

## • Digital rights:

The violations monitored by AFTE during the reporting period are limited to two patterns: first, the arrest of Internet users and charging activists because of the use of social media; the second pattern is the continued censorship of the Internet and the blocking of more websites. The report reviews these two patterns, as follows:

### - Arrests:

AFTE monitored five violations of digital rights, including three violations related to the referendum on constitutional amendments. Five citizens were arrested during the reporting period. The prosecution charged most of those arrested with “the use of a social media account to commit a crime punishable by the law that would threaten the security and safety of society.” The violations during this period are as follows:

On April 21, 2019, security forces arrested Amir Mohammed Eissa, in front of a school in Qalyub area, while filming irregularities in front of a polling station during the referendum to amend the constitution. On the same day, Ahmed Badawi Abdel Meguid was arrested in the fifth settlement area because he raised a banner calling on citizens to vote against the constitutional amendments.

The Supreme State Security Prosecution charged both Eissa and Abdel Meguid of belonging to a terrorist group and using an account on social media to commit a crime punishable by the law that would threaten the security and safety of the community. They were imprisoned pending investigations into the case No. 674 of 2019 of the Supreme State Security Prosecution.

On April 22, 2019, the third day of voting in the referendum on the constitutional amendments, police arrested Abeer Al Safti. Al Safti was on her way to Kafr El Dawar in Beheira governorate, when the police forced the passengers of the vehicle she was travelling in to participate in the referendum. Al Safti protested against forcing the passengers to vote, which led to her arrest.

The Supreme State Security Prosecution accused Abeer Al Safti of joining a terrorist group and misusing her account on social media. The Supreme State Security Prosecution decided to detain her in case No. 674 for the year 2019, which is the same case in which Ahmed Badawi and Amir Eissa are detained. Al Safti was previously put in pre-trial detention pending the “Metro protests” case. She was released on November 19, 2018, and the pre-trial detention was replaced with precautionary measures.

Security forces arrested Rania Al Gwaily from her home in Al Rehab city on 12 May, 2019. She was not brought before the prosecution until 16 May 2019. The Supreme State Security Prosecution charged her with participating with a terrorist group in achieving its purposes and using her account on social media to commit a crime punishable by the law that would threaten the security and safety of society. The case in which she is charged is case No. 741 of 2019, with the lawyer Haitham Mohamadin and Mustafa Maher.

According to the statements by Gamila Sherif, daughter of Al Gwaily, 18 years, to Al Manasa website, five persons in civilian clothes raided the house at 2 pm and searched the house and the cell phones of both Al Gwaily and her daughter. They also seized Al Gwaily's laptop and refused to answer any questions related to the reason of her arrest. Al Gwaily has written on her personal Facebook page about the increase in prices, which is likely to be the reason for her arrest, according to Mokhtar Mounir, a lawyer at AFTE.

On December 5, 2019, security forces arrested Dr. Khaled Azab, Director of Projects at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, from his home in Cairo. The prosecution held him in pre trial detention pending investigations for charges of publishing false news and misuse of social media.

#### **- Internet censorship:**

The number of blocked websites in Egypt has increased to 529 since the Egyptian authorities began blocking websites in May 2017. AFTE monitored blocking 17 sites in the second quarter of this year, between political sites, online viewing sites, and press and cinema sites.

The violations during this period are as follows:

A campaign named "Invalid" that aims to collect signatures to reject the constitutional amendment, announced the launch of its accounts on Facebook and Twitter on 8 April 2019. The campaign used the domain (voiceonline.net). The next day, the campaign's sites were blocked after it announced the collection of 60,000 signatures rejecting the constitutional amendments.

On April 10, the campaign launched a new domain in an attempt to circumvent the previous blockage. The new domain was also blocked a day after it was launched. Campaigners continued to launch alternative domains for a week whenever a domain was blocked; during this week 7 domains were blocked. It is noted that while blocking "Invalid" campaign's sites, it is likely that all websites sharing the IP address 104,198.14.52 were blocked in Egypt, with a total of 26175 domains.

On May 15, with the showing of Ramadan drama on TV, seven websites that stream movies and series were blocked in Egypt, the most famous of which was egypt.best website. Egypt.best contains a huge library of content for online streaming and has a large audience base. The reason for blocking the sites is likely to be launching “Watch It” platform by Egyptian media group, through which the TV series, including those shown in Ramadan could be viewed for LE 100 per month. The continued access by the users to free viewing websites would weaken Egyptian Media plans to attract subscriptions to its platform. It should be noted that Egyptian Media is co-owned by the General Intelligence; hence, it is likely that the influence of security agencies was used in the blocking of online viewing websites.

By the end of June, Egypt.best’s administrators announced that the website would return to work, but on conditions that no Arabic content is posted, and that all existing Arabic content is deleted. This strengthens the assumption that the blockade was used to serve the Egyptian media group.

Al Tahrir newspaper’s website was also blocked. Al Tahrir institution published a statement on May 15, 2019, announcing a malfunction in the site that prevents visitors from accessing the published news, according to what the report mentioned in the press and media freedom section.

Bitly’s website for shorting links was blocked on April 18, 2019, which blocked all short links from the site. A number of news sites rely on short links in the publication of their reports on social media, making it difficult for readers and users to access sites and news; after a few days bitly’s block was removed. Elcinema.com website was also blocked on 30 May 2018. The site contains a huge library of information and data about films and serials in the Arab world. It offers online movie reservation service, and there are no obvious reasons to block the site; the site’s administrators did not comment on the blockade.

### • **Freedom of creativity:**

In the second quarter of 2019, AFTE monitored three violations against creators, ranging from prison sentences to preventing a theater play. The Giza misdemeanors court sentenced belly dancer, Gawhara to one year in prison. Al Dekheila misdemeanors court of appeal issued a two months imprisonment verdict against artist Hamo Bika, while a sovereign entity banned the play “Satan’s good deed”, which was to be shown at Romance theater, after the censorship refused to license the show.

The violations during this period are as follows:

### **- Imprisonment sentences:**

On April 10, 2019, Al Dekheila misdemeanors court of appeal issued a two months imprisonment sentence against artist Hamo Bika, for holding a concert without a license. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of the same month, Bika's petition was accepted and the execution of the sentence was stopped pending the decision concerning the appeal, and he was released.

The incident dates back to the last quarter of 2018, when the Syndicate of Musical Professions canceled two performances of Bika "in order to preserve the public taste". In November 2018, the Syndicate's lawyer filed a legal complaint against Bika while he was preparing for a concert in Alexandria. The syndicate accused him of "singing without permission and tarnishing public taste". The legal complaint, which was filed under the number 13812 for the year 2018 Al Dekheila administrative, was sent to Al Dekheila misdemeanors court, which sentenced Beka to three months in prison for practicing singing and holding an audio visual ceremony without obtaining a license from the Ministry of Culture.

It should be noted that Hamo Bika tried in February of this year to get the necessary permits to sing, but the Syndicate refused to grant him working or affiliated membership or even a temporary permission to sing.

On April 10, 2019, the Giza Misdemeanors Court sentenced the female dancer, Gawhara, to one year in prison for incitement to debauchery and immorality. The incident dates back to February 2018, when the Russian dancer was arrested by the police and was then charged with practicing belly dancing without permission, wearing a dancing dress contrary to the requirements of the law, and working without a permit from the ministry of man power, in the legal record No. 2, criminal investigation department for the year 2018. The prosecution decided to release her on the same day of her arrest on bail of 5,000 pounds.

### **- Banning the play "Satan's good deed"**

On April 13, 2019, Mohammed Karem, a lawyer and theater director, published on his Facebook account that a sovereign authority ordered the banning of the play "Satan's good deed". The crisis began in May 2017 when Karem presented the script to the censorship to get a permit, but the censorship refused the title of the play and some scenes in it. It asked Karem to change the title to "Satan's good deed!", or "The good deed and Satan". When Karem rejected these amendments, the censorship did not give him a response either with acceptance or rejection. After more than

six months of trying to get the permit, those in charge of the play decided to show it without a permit. It was shown in January 2018, at the Jesuit Theater, for two successive days. In February of the same year it was shown again without a permit at the Romance Theater.

On April 15, 2018, Karem published, "After the approval of all censorship committees, the director of the department of plays' censorship referred the play to Al Azhar". In turn, the general directorate of research, writing and translation of Al Azhar examined and reviewed the script based on the censorship request, and Al Azhar's response came in December 2018, describing the play as, "not up to its title and what it promises to deliver." Al Azhar objected because the play contained "many words of insults and swearing, and expressions of dissatisfaction with God's destiny". It also objected to the title "Satan's good deed" because, according to the statement, "the play did not mention one good deed done by Satan to be consistent with its title".

Karem published Al Azhar's statement on his personal page and commented that this is a fight against art, adding that he will file a legal complaint to the Attorney General against Al Azhar and will take all necessary legal measures. Indeed, in February 2019, Karem filed a legal complaint to the Attorney General against the Minister of Culture, the Chairman of the Censorship of Artistic Works, the director of the Censorship on Plays, the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar and the Director General of the General Directorate for Research, Writing and Translation. The legal complaint carried the number 1792 for the year 2019. It accused them of "Fraud and fighting creativity and art". It called on the Attorney General to go back to the text of Article 4 paragraph B of Law No. 430 of 1955, which states that "the authority overseeing censorship must decide on the permit request within thirty days at the most, from the date of submission of the request. The request is considered granted if no decision is issued by this authority within the period specified". In the case of "Satan's good deed", Karem waited for more than six months without obtaining approval or even rejection.

Karem decided to show the play again at Romance Theater, on 12 April 2019, based on the above legal text. Indeed the play was shown successfully for the first day, but the next day, a sovereign entity decided to close the theater and prevent the play. "Awlad Haram" theater group, which performs the play wrote on its Facebook page: "We are sorry to all those who were going to attend today, but the government is afraid of art."

### **Third: Recommendations on the protection of freedom of expression:**

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AFTE presents a number of recommendations that would protect freedom of expression. The recommendations are based on its analysis of the state of freedom of expression during the second quarter of 2019. These recommendations aim at encouraging local and international stakeholders to continue the dialogue with the Egyptian authorities on adherence to international conventions that protect freedom of expression and free flow of information. These recommendations are:

- The Supreme Council for Media Regulation should investigate the sources of funding of the Egyptian Media Group and the extent of its commitment to anti-monopoly policies.
- The Egyptian authorities must stop the procedures of blocking websites and must lift the ban on hundreds of blocked sites.
- The Supreme Council for Media Regulation must stop censorship of the security agencies of printed newspapers, which lead to the prevention of printing newspapers and preventing the publication of opinion articles.

### **Conclusion:**

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The report discussed the violations that took place during the second quarter of 2019, in the files of freedom of expression. It also explained the political context that Egypt is witnessing and its impact on the state of freedom of expression. Through this periodic report, AFTE seeks to encourage the target groups of journalists, creators, activists and academics to advocate for freedom of expression and provide documented information on the state of freedom of expression to assist local and international organizations in their efforts to defend human rights.