



**Quarterly Report on the State of Freedom of Expression in Egypt
Third Quarter (July-September 2019)**

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Methodology

The report presents and analyzes 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 June 26th to September 30th, 2019. The period covered by the report was exceptionally extended to the end of September, due to the repressive wave the country witnessed during September.

Introduction

The continued decline in the practice of the right to freedom of expression by Egyptian citizens is considered a direct result of the practices of the regime of President Sisi, who is facing a major crisis in the managing internal politics, hence the Egyptian authorities are increasingly resorting to suppressing freedom of expression with the aim of eliminating the opportunities of political opposition or peaceful protest.

AFTE monitored in its third quarterly report for 2019 the expansion of human rights violations, particularly the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. These are rights linked to enabling the citizens to participate politically.

The massive violations of the right to freedom of expression occurred in conjunction with limited demonstrations in September, called for by the contractor Mohammed Ali, who accused the president and the military establishment of corruption.

During this year, Sisi's regime succeeded in passing constitutional amendments and aborting a move by the opposition parties aiming to build an electoral alliance for the 2020 parliamentary elections. The regime also implemented economic reforms, which included the removal of fuel subsidies. But September protests raised questions and concerns about the internal political situation and the stability of the country; it has been shown that there is anger among citizens as a result of the deterioration of the living conditions, as well as the lack of political tools through which the current regime can stop the policies that cause the deterioration of the living conditions and the freezing of political activities.

Sisi's regime launched a crackdown that led to the arrest of more than four thousand people, according to what the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms monitored, which was published on October 20, 2019. Hundreds of those arrested were released, but there are more than two thousand citizens who are still in pre-trial detention, in addition to dozens who forcibly disappeared. The report addresses in its first section the scale of the crackdown during the September protests, both at the level of human rights violations or the abuse in the use of pre-trial detention, as well as the situation of human rights defenders who have been arrested, such as Mohamad Al-Baqer and Israa Abdel Fattah.

In the second section, the report addresses the impact of the crackdown during the September protests on freedom of the media, freedom of creativity, digital rights, and academic freedom. Several journalists, creators and university professors have been subjected to detention and pre-trial detention. The Egyptian authorities continued to practice internet censorship and it blocked more websites, including journalistic and news websites; Egyptian authorities also tried to prevent access to the internet before the September 27th demonstrations. In its third section, the report presents some recommendations to the concerned entities, with the aim of stopping the significant decline in the practice of the right to freedom of expression.

First: A reading into the state of freedom of expression

The first section of the report focuses on the analysis of the political context affecting the state of freedom of expression, and highlights pressing issues through which public policy towards the freedom of expression and circulation of information could be understood. The first section starts with the consequences of the September 20th demonstrations, and the subsequent wide crackdown which extended to journalists, human rights defenders and political activists.

- **September demonstrations: Massive violations of the right to freedom of demonstration, freedom of expression and the right to privacy**

Dozens of citizens demonstrated in downtown Cairo in the evening of September 20th, in response to a call by the contractor Mohamed Ali to demonstrate in protest of the rule of president Sisi and to call on him to leave power. Also, demonstrations erupted at night in other cities, including Alexandria, Suez, Damietta and Mahalla. Security forces responded by arresting some demonstrators, as well as passers-by in the streets surrounding the demonstrations. They used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the demonstrators, resulting in casualties among the demonstrators.

The manner in which the security forces handled the limited demonstrations shows the continuation of the policy formulated by the current regime since 2013. The protest law was issued and the regime responded violently to the opposing protests especially that the Egyptian authorities have restricted the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and required a prior notice. Also, despite attempts by opposition parties over the past years to comply with these restrictions that contradict international standards, the Egyptian authorities did not allow the opposition parties to demonstrate.

In addition to the suppression of demonstrations, police forces continued to arrest protesters in Suez on the evening of September 21st, police forces also arrested citizens from the streets and some activists from their homes, till the 27th of September. This period witnessed massive violations of the right to privacy, as the police forces set up checkpoints, especially in the vicinity of downtown Cairo. They stopped the pedestrians and checked their mobile phones, arresting whoever posted content that is critical to Sisi's regime on social media.

On September 27th, the police forces closed the main streets in downtown Cairo and set up several checkpoints in several governorates such as Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and Suez. The heavy security presence has prevented citizens from gathering in the streets, and in some cases, when small gatherings occurred in Giza and Alexandria the demonstrators were quickly dispersed using

tear gas, but small demonstrations erupted in Qena and Luxor in southern Egypt. Despite the limited demonstrations on September 27, the police forces continued to arrest citizens, activists and human rights defenders in the days following the September 27's demonstrations.

- **Investigations by the Supreme State Security Prosecution: Repeated accusations and imprisonment pending investigations for all demonstrators**

The Supreme State Security Prosecution interrogated the citizens arrested during the September demonstrations. The majority of those arrested were included in the case 1338 Supreme State Security, which included hundreds of defendants. Despite the different circumstances of the arrest of these suspects, including their spread in various governorates, the Supreme State Security Prosecution decided to accuse them of the same charges related to the misuse of social media, participating with a terrorist group, spreading false news, and demonstrating without a permit. Not only has the state security prosecution arbitrarily accused hundreds of citizens, but its decisions were to imprison the defendants pending investigations and to renew their detention throughout the month that followed the demonstrations.

The Attorney General issued a statement concerning the arrested, in September 26, 2019, in which he acknowledged that the public prosecution interrogated no more than a thousand demonstrators. This was the first official statement that acknowledges what was monitored by human rights organizations concerning the wide crackdown that led to the arrest of hundreds of citizens. The statement by the Attorney General said: "Some of the defendants admitted their involvement in demonstrations in some areas in five governorates. Their confessions revealed different reasons that led them to demonstrate, including the poor economic conditions, while some of them said they were deceived by some pages on social media claiming to belong to some government entities; these pages called on citizens to demonstrate. According to the defendants they later discovered the invalidity of those pages. Others said they demonstrated because they oppose the current regime. Some defendants confessed that they met some unknown elements in Tahrir Square that incited them to film some scenes in the field to broadcast them via satellite channels to incite citizens to demonstrate. Other defendants confessed that some criminal elements and others aligned to the Muslim Brotherhood participated in the demonstrations".

The General Prosecution's statement also stated that many defendants defended themselves saying they were present in demonstrations' locations to find out the truth after the media published conflicting reports of the demonstrations and the size of participants. Others said there were calls to celebrate the victory of Al-Ahli club in a football match, while some said they were accidentally present at the demonstrations' sites. But despite the lack of evidence of the validity of the charges against the accused, the Supreme State Security Prosecution decided to imprison all the accused. This statement has provoked widespread criticism of the investigating authorities; hence the

public prosecution later issued statements over last October, in which it announced the release of hundreds of defendants, while hundreds others are still in pre-trial detention. Public prosecution statements lacked any detailed information on the number and the names of the detainees, as well as those released.

Human rights defenders faced a fierce crackdown in conjunction with the September demonstrations; blogger Alaa Abdel-Fattah, lawyer Mohamad Al-Baqer and activist Esraa Abdel Fattah were arrested. Alaa Abdel-Fattah and Al-Baqer were assaulted and tortured in prison, while Esraa Abdel Fattah was tortured in one of the headquarters of national security, after she was kidnapped from the street, and before being presented to the prosecution. The three human rights defenders accused the security authorities of torture; Esraa Abdel Fattah started a hunger strike to demand an investigation into the charges.

Before the report was released, the crackdown on human rights defenders has increased furiously; Amr Imam, the lawyer at the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), was arrested, also unidentified persons attacked the director of (ANHRI), Gamal Eid, near his office, his car was stolen, then the car of a lawyer at (ANHRI) –which Eid had borrowed- was smashed.

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

In its second section, the report addresses violations of freedom of expression in the following files: freedom of the press and the media, digital rights, freedom of creativity, and academic freedom.

- **Freedom of the press and the media:**

Detention and imprisonment of journalists is the most common pattern of violations of freedom of the media, during the third quarter of 2019; the monitoring and documentation unit monitored fewer violations at the level of prevention of coverage and publishing.

- **Imprisonment of journalists:** Police arrested five journalists, in connection with the September 20th demonstrations, as follows:

- **Mohammed Oxygen:** ANHRI announced in September 21st, 2019, that journalist and blogger Mohamed Ibrahim, known as Oxygen, was transferred to the Maadi National Security headquarters, while he was in El-Basatin police station as part of the precautionary measures in case No. 621 of the year 2018 National Security¹. El-Basatin police station refused to disclose the whereabouts of Oxygen, denying his presence in the police station or that they know his whereabouts. ANHRI has announced that Oxygen contacted its director by phone from El-Basatin police station -while he was there as part of the precautionary measures- to inform him that an officer of the National Security came to take him to the National Security headquarters in Maadi.

Oxygen was active in demonstrations demanding the departure of President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, which started on September 20th, 2019. Prior to the issuance of this report, Oxygen appeared in the State Security Prosecution as a defendant in the case No. 1356 of the year 2018 State Security after he disappeared for 18 days. The prosecution accused him of misuse of social media, and spreading false news. The prosecutor ordered his imprisonment for 15 days pending investigation.

- **Omar Hisham:** Security forces released journalist at Masrawy website, Omar Hisham, without filing any police reports or directing any charges, after he was illegally detained from September 20th, 2019 to October 2nd, 2019². Security forces have arrested Omar Hisham from downtown while he was covering the celebrations by Al Ahli club's fans after winning the Egyptian Super Cup, as mentioned by Masrawy website.

1. ANHRI website, Accessed on October 10th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2VDJFDz>.

2. Masrawy website, Accessed on October 10th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2IPjeWu>

- **Abdullah Ghoneim:** At the same time, security forces released Abdullah Ghoneim, journalist at Almnasa website, without filing any police reports or directing any charges after he was illegally detained from September 25th, 2019. The security forces had arrested Ghoneim while returning from his hometown in Mahalla to Cairo.

- **Islam Mosadak:** On October 12th, 2019, the Supreme State Security Prosecution ordered the detention of photojournalist at CBC channel, Islam Mosadak, for 15 days, pending investigations in case No. 488 of 2019 state security. The prosecution accused him of participating with a terrorist group knowing its purposes, publishing false news, and the use of a social media account to spread rumors.

Mosadak was arrested from his home, the dawn of September 25th, 2019, and his whereabouts was unknown. His family found out that he was interrogated by the prosecution and imprisoned without the presence of his lawyer. Mada Masr website mentioned in a report that CBC channel's management fired Mosadak after he was imprisoned by the State Security Prosecution³.

- **Ingy Abdul Whab:** On September 26th, 2019, State Security Prosecution ordered the detention of journalist at Al Masry Al Youm, Ingy Abdul Whab for 15 days pending investigations in the legal record number 1338 of the year 2019 state security. The police forces stationed in Tahrir Square arrested Ingy, on September 20th, 2019, during the demonstrations. The whereabouts of Ingy remained unknown and she was not presented to any investigative body until September 26th, 2019. Security Prosecution accused her of participating with a terrorist knowing its purposes, and spreading false news. Later, the prosecution ordered the release of Ingy Abdul Whab.

For more information about Imprisonment of journalists: shorturl.at/bkxBK

- **Prevention of coverage:**

On July 26th, 2019, actresses Yousra and Elham Shaheen kicked out journalist at El-Dostour newspaper, Radwa Abdul Ghani, outside the hall where people were paying their condolences after the death of Yousra's mother, while the journalist was covering the event. El-Dostour newspaper reported that while the journalist was doing her job, she was surprised that Yousra headed to her and asked for her personal identification card⁴. El-Dostour added that Abdel Ghani told Yousra that she is a journalist covering the event, but Yousra kicked her out of the hall with the help of actress Elham Shaheen.

Journalist at Masrawy website and Al-Ahram El-Zeraay, Ahmad Mossaad was assaulted on August 26th, 2019 by the guards of the Minister of Agriculture, Izz al-Deen Abu Stait, while covering the ministry's celebration of the top graduates of the faculties of agriculture at the Agriculture Syndicate.

3. Mada Masr website, Accessed on October 1st, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2OKKuJk>

4. El-Dostour website, Accessed on October 10th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2otv9IX>

Mossaad said in a statement to Cairo 24 website that the security personal in charge of the hall where the celebration was held asked the journalists to go back during the filming⁵, but although they followed the instructions he was pushed by a member of the minister's guards. Mossaad added that he asked the guard to stay away, but the guard pushed the phone out of Mossaad's hand, saying: "This is not my will and the minister can see us".

Mossaad stressed that the Information Office interfered and sent the guards away from him. Mossaad said that he had to withdraw from the ceremony and filed a formal complaint to the Journalists Syndicate. For his part, the member of the Freedoms Committee at the Journalists Syndicate, Amr Badr, said to Cairo 24 website that the problem ended with the ministry's apology to the journalist, and the journalist's acceptance of the apology and decision to stop legal actions with the promise by the ministry officials not to repeat what happened again and the commitment to deal with all journalists in the appropriate manner⁶.

Preventing publication: On August 5th, 2019 Dr. Mostafa El-Said, the political science professor, posted on his face book account that an article he wrote for Al-Shrouk newspaper was banned⁷. El-Said added that the article addresses the multiple faces of poverty in Egypt, and that he relied in the article on the data from the income and expenditure survey, which was recently issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. El-Said asked about the reason for preventing the article, adding that he knew that this was out of the will of Al-Shorouk Newspaper.

- **Digital rights:**

Egyptian authorities continue to censor the internet. The September 20th demonstrations showed that the Egyptian authorities are upset because some news websites are covering the activities opposing president Al-Sisi. On the other hand, there are repeated charges related to the exercise of freedom of expression through the internet. In the third quarter of 2019, there were several attempts by the Egyptian authorities to stifle access to the Internet, in order to influence the participation in the September demonstrations.

- **Internet censorship and attempts to stifle access to it:**

The official website of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation published an article entitled "Blocking and fines are the penalty for spreading rumors in the media"⁸ hours before the September

5. Cairo 24 website, A Accessed on October 10th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2IMPEkb>

6. Cairo 24 website, A Accessed on October 10th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2oCSiSP>

7. A post by Mostafa El-Said on his face book page on August 5th, 2019. Accessed on October 10th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/33vFRHs>

8. The Supreme Council for Media Regulation: Blocking and fines are the penalty for spreading rumors in the media, September 20th, 2019, Accessed on October 7th, 2019, <http://bit.ly/33qUb3F>

20th demonstrations started. That was only a reminder of Article 17 of the Council's Sanctions Regulations, which determined that any newspaper or media outlet or website that publish or broadcast false news or rumors or calls for violation of the law or incitement to that, are subjected to sanctions ranging from "preventing the publication or the broadcast or blocking the page or the program or the website for a specific period or permanently".

Indeed, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation moved in this direction, so some internet users encountered on September 22nd, 2019, difficulty in accessing both "BBC" and "Al Hurra" websites using different service providers. It turned out that the Egyptian authorities blocked both "BBC" and "Al Hurra" websites; the head of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, Makram Mohamed Ahmed, told BBC website that he was not officially informed of the names of the sites that were blocked, but his preliminary information confirms the blocking of news websites because of publishing "inaccurate" news of the demonstrations.

On the same day, ARIJ, a website specialized in investigative journalism that covers the Arab region, was blocked. The last material on Egypt that was published on the website was entitled "The Religion Category".⁹ "7iber" website was also blocked on September 26th, 2019, after publishing a news story entitled "Two Jordanians detained in Egypt: a routine visit ends with arrest and "confessing" on the screen"¹⁰. The news story discussed the details of the arrest of two young men: Thaer Matar and Abdul Rahman Alroajbah; Matar was arrested on September 22nd, from the surroundings of Tahrir Square, while Alroajbah was arrested from his home, at dawn of the next day. Later, the two Jordanian young men appeared in "The Story" program presented by Amr Adib, confessing they participated in the September 20th demonstrations, and that they filmed the demonstrations in order to publish the videos on their social media accounts. On October 2nd, 2019, the Egyptian security forces released both Matar and Alroajbah. "7iber" website is still blocked in Egypt on some networks; "7iber" identifies itself as a media institution and an electronic magazine, launched in 2007 from Jordan as a platform to inform the citizen and is run voluntarily. It developed to a professional magazine in 2012.

After the limited demonstrations which took place on September 20, a second call for demonstrating appeared on September 27. Before the eruption of more limited demonstrations on September 27th, the Egyptian authorities tried to block instant messaging applications or prevent access to them;¹¹ Egyptian authorities blocked 11 instant messaging applications sites, most notably Wicker and Signal, and also tried to block access to Wire and Facebook Messenger applications.

Thus, the number of blocked sites in Egypt reached 546 websites at least, after the crackdown

9.Mahmoud el Shal, "The Religion Category", ARIJ, Accessed on October 13th, 2019. Link: <http://bit.ly/2OT7ia7>

10.Omar Fraes, "Two Jordanians detained in Egypt: a routine visit ends with arrest and "confessing" on the screen", September 26th, 2019, Accessed October 7th, 2019, Link: <http://bit.ly/2VCTpshr>

11.AFTE, Accessed on October 7th, 2019, Link: <http://bit.ly/2MzU0MI>

that accompanied the September demonstrations. It should be noted that some of the mentioned websites had been blocked for a limited period of time, and then returned to work normally, while others are still blocked until the time of the report.

On the other hand, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation issued a decree on August 24th, 2019 to block both Al Ekhbariya and Assabah News websites, because of “the practice of extortion by publishing false news harming the activities of Huawei company in Egypt, and violating the professional code of honor and written standards” according to the news published on the official website of the Council. The decree came after the recommendation of the complaints committee regarding the complaint filed by the legal representative of Huawei Company for technologies in Egypt, and the approval of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation¹². After investigating the complaint, the Committee recommended obliging the sites to remove the content that affects the company, and to compel the websites to apologize clearly and explicitly to the company. Despite these recommendations, the Council decided to block both sites for a period of 3 months, but according to what AFTE monitored, the decision was not implemented and the websites operate normally and could be accessed.

- Freedom of expression using the internet:

The Egyptian authorities continued targeting political activists and internet users by directing charges related to the misuse of social media, leading to decisions by the Supreme State Security Prosecution to detain defendants pending investigations. In conjunction with the call for the September 20th demonstrations, the Egyptian authorities arrested a number of activists, because of expressing their opinions using the internet. In what follows the report provides an overview of these cases:

Case 488 for the year 2019 Supreme State Security

Security forces arrested the leftist activist Kamal Khalil from his house on September 16th, 2019. He was interrogated the following day by the Supreme State Security Prosecution, which decided to imprison him for 15 days pending investigations on charges of joining a terrorist group and spreading false news, in the case 488 for the year 2019 Supreme State Security. The case 488 dates back to the first quarter of the year, specifically in March, when demonstration calls appeared to denounce the Ramses train accident, which claimed the lives of at least 21 people. In the day scheduled for protest, AFTE monitored the arrest of 68 people from various governorates on suspicions of protesting in March 1st, although the response to the demonstration calls was limited. All the arrested were accused of “engaging with a terrorist group in one of the activities of that group, and the use of social media to promote the ideas of the group”, in case No. 488 of 2019 Supreme State Security.

 12.The Supreme Council for Media Regulation, Accessed on September 13th, 2019, Link: <http://bit.ly/33vfH7E>

Two days after the end of the September 20th demonstrations, the security forces arrested a lawyer, a journalist and two university professors from different locations and the State Security Prosecution included them all to the same case. On September 22nd, 2019, security forces arrested lawyer Mahinour El-Masry in front of the headquarters of the state security prosecution in the Fifth Settlement, after she attended the prosecutor's investigations with one of the defendants, and she was taken to an unknown destination. The next day, Mahinour was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution; she was charged with the same charges directed to activist Kamal Khalil.

On September 25th, 2019, security forces arrested two political science professors at Cairo University, Hassan Nafaa, Hazem Hosni, and journalist Khaled Dawoud, former president of the Destour Party. The Supreme State Security Prosecution charged them in the same case, No. 488 of 2019, of participating with a terrorist group in achieving its objectives, spreading and dissemination of false rumors that disturb public security, and misuse of social media by broadcasting false rumors; they were all detained pending investigations.

Case 1356 Supreme State Security

Programmer Alaa Abdel-Fattah and lawyer and human rights defender Muhammad Al-Baqer were imprisoned pending case No. 1356 of 2019 Supreme State Security. On September 29th, 2019, Dr. Laila Suef, Alaa Abdel-Fattah's mother learned from Dokki police station that Abdel-Fattah was arrested and deported to the State Security Prosecution. A number of lawyers headed to attend the investigations with Abdel Fattah, including lawyer Muhammad Al-Baqer who was surprised at the prosecution's office that there is detention decision against him pending the same case as Abdel-Fattah. Security forces detained Al-Baqer and interrogated him, as the prosecution decided to imprison him and Abdel-Fattah pending the case, with charges of joining a terrorist group knowing its purpose and the misuse of social media to deliberately broadcast and publish false news and rumors that disturb public security and spread terror among the people.

In a hearing to renew the detention of Abdel Fattah and Al-Baqer on October 10th, 2019, Abdel Fattah requested proving he was beaten and insulted since his arrival to his place of detention in Tora severe security prison 2, according to a post by his sister Mona Seif on her verified face book page. Mona clarified that the prison administration has threatened Abdel Fattah, and warned him of mentioning what he was subjected to in the prison to the prosecutor.¹³

In addition to these two cases, there is case 1338 for the year 2019, which includes hundreds of people who were arrested in relation to the September demonstrations, and among the accused in this case Hazem Ghoneim, brother of activist Wael Ghoneim. In conjunction with the appearance of the contractor Muhammad Ali, who called for demonstrations, Wael Ghoneim began to

13. Mona Seif, October 10th, 2019, Accessed on October 13th, 2019, Link: <http://bit.ly/2B6DTki>

broadcast video clips from the United States, where he lives since he left Egypt several years ago. In these clips Wael Ghoneim addressed several topics related to public affairs in Egypt.

On September 19th, 2019, Wael Ghoneim appeared in a broadcast on his face book page entitled “State security at home”; Ghoneim said that the state security forces stormed his family’s home in Egypt and are interrogating members of his family. Minutes later, Wael confirmed that security forces arrested his brother, dentist Hazem Ghoneim, from his house and escorted him to an unknown place. In another post on his page, Wael Ghoneim said that the security forces had seized his mother’s personal mobile phone, her passport, and 28 thousand dollars from the house.

The next day, the State Security Prosecution decided to imprison Hazem Ghoneim, pending investigation in case No. 1338 of 2019 supreme state security, and he was charged with participating in a move that includes the Muslims Brotherhood in order to carry out hostile activities, the participation with a terrorist group knowing its purposes, the use of social media for the purpose of committing a crime punishable by law, and publishing and broadcasting false news in order to disturb public peace and spreading strife.

On the other hand, security forces arrested the media professional Medhat Essa on August 27th, 2019, from his house, after a low ranking police man went to his house to inquire about him. Then the low ranking police man went back to Essa’s house, accompanied by a national security police officer and they searched the place, although they did not declare that they got a search warrant. After the completion of the inspection, Essa’s mobile phone was confiscated, and he gave them the passwords of his social media personal accounts.

Essa was taken blindfolded to the state security building in Sheikh Zayed, where he spent the night there, before being taken to October third police station where he was brought before the prosecution without the presence of lawyers. The prosecution accused Essa of creating a page on Facebook to spread rumors and false news, and decided to imprison him for four days pending investigation in case No. 2888 of 2019.

According to a telephone call with Essa, the prosecution confronted him with posts on his personal face book page, including a photo saying “No to the constitutional amendments” and other posts opposing the ruling regime. The investigations were not related to his work in the media, as he was suspended from work three years ago. At the hearing on August 31st, Essa was released, but the prosecutor appealed the decision. At the hearing on September 2nd, 2019, the prosecutor’s appeal was rejected, and his release was supported on bail of 20 thousand pounds pending investigations.

- **Freedom of creativity:**

The security practices aimed at suppressing the September demonstrations extended to the creators, and although creators were randomly subjected to these violations and not in relation to the practice of creativity, they raised the attention of the artists and writers' society, who sought to defend their colleagues and condemn the practices of the security forces. Most of the creators who were arrested were included in the case 1338 supreme state security; the report provides the circumstances of the arrest of the creators as follows

1- Mina Samir Ibrahim El-Defshy

Security forces arrested director Mina Samir known by Mina El-Defshy, on September 23rd, 2019, from the surroundings of Tahrir Square, where security forces were stopping passers-by, searching their mobile phones and browsing their personal accounts on social media. El-Defshy was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution, in September 28th, 2019, and charged with participating with a terrorist group in achieving its objectives, broadcasting and publishing of false news, the misuse of social media, and participating in a demonstration without a permit, pending case No. 1338 of the year 2019 Supreme State Security.

Director Mossad Foda, head of the Cinema Professions syndicate and president of the Union of Arab Artists submitted a request to the Attorney General that stated that the syndicate is confirming the “good conduct and reputation of the director Mina Samir Ibrahim Yousef and that he was on his way to his home and had not been involved in any acts contrary to the law”. Foda also asked that the necessary legal procedures be taken to “watch what was filmed by the cameras surrounding the location in which Mina Samir Ibrahim Yousef, the member Cinema Professions syndicate, was arrested to prove that he is not involved in any incidents attributed to him.”¹⁴

On October 9th, 2019, a group of workers in the field of cinema published a statement asking the Attorney General, the Minister of Interior and the Head of the Supreme State Security Prosecution to quickly release El-Defshy and to well treat him, as he did not participate in any acts against the law. The statement was signed by a large number of directors, actors and producers, including director Dawoud Abdel Sayed, and director Yousry Nasrallah. The statement stressed that El-Defshy was arrested while leaving the metro station near Abdel Moneim Riad Square, “where he was on the way to his house, he did not intend to participate in demonstrations and there were no demonstrations on that day”.¹⁵ Mina El-Defshy was released on October 24th, 2019, before the release of this report.

14. A copy of the request.

15. A statement by Egyptian filmmakers, October 9th, 2009, Link: <http://bit.ly/2VFcxLz>

2- Toqa Tarek

Security forces arrested the singer Toqa Tarek from the vicinity of down town, on September 29th, 2019. Her whereabouts were unknown until she was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution, on October 2nd. She was charged of participating with a terrorist group in achieving its objectives, broadcasting and publishing false news, the misuse of social media, and participating in a demonstration without a permit; she was imprisoned pending case No. 1338 of the year 2019 supreme state security. Toqa Tarek was released on October 24th, 2019, before the release of this report.

3- Ezz Darwish

Security forces arrested playwright Ezz Darwish, on September 29th, 2019, in Champollion Street in Alexandria. Darwish was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution, in October 1st, 2019, and the prosecution decided to detain him pending investigation in case No. 1338 of the year 2019 supreme state security. Darwish was accused of involving with a terrorist group in achieving its objectives, broadcasting and publishing false news, the misuse of social media, and participating in a demonstration without a permit.

On the other hand, two creators were detained without charges; they were later released, namely: poet Amina Abdullah and writer Mohamed Aladdin. The security forces stopped the poet Amina Abdullah, on September 21st, 2019, during her walk in downtown Cairo close to her home, and detained her in an undisclosed location. Three days later, writer Mohamed Aladdin was stopped in a similar manner in the Dokki area where he lives; the whereabouts of the two of them were unknown for several days.

Despite following all the legal procedures to determine their fate, the concerned bodies have not made any statements, prompting some writers and intellectuals to publish a statement, on September 29th, 2019, to ask the competent authorities to disclose their whereabouts¹⁶. In the statement they said: “We, the signatories of this statement, ask the competent authorities to immediately disclose the whereabouts of the novelist Mohamed Aladdin and poet Amina Abdullah, and to provide all guarantees for their freedom and their right to express their opinion, and we also ask the Egyptian Writers Union and the Ministry of culture, to carry out the role assigned to them in the protection of writers and intellectuals”.

 16. A statement by writers and intellectuals, September 29th, 2019, Accessed on October 7th, 2019, link: <http://bit.ly/32dz2d7>

The statement was signed by more than two hundred novelists, publishers, and creators, and this was before the release of Amina Abdullah in the first of October 2019, and the release of Mohamed Aladdin, the next day, without filing any police reports or bringing them before the prosecution.

At the level of the attack practiced by the Syndicate of Musical Professions on the “Mahraganat songs”, the head of the Syndicate of Musical Professions, Hani Shaker, has issued a decree banning “mahraganat” singers from singing in the northern coast, on July 10th, 2019. Shaker also sent a request to the head of Marsa Matrouh security asking him to cooperate with the inspection committee delegated by the syndicate in the North coast to “prevent the work of anyone who is not a member of the syndicate and does not hold a work permit from it: those who are called “mahraganat” singers.” Shaker also asked to “file legal reports for those who violate the decision and those who are not registered in the syndicate and who are unauthorized to work and to submit the legal reports to the police station concerned.”¹⁷

The syndicate did not stop at this point, as it issued a decree on August 8th, 2019, banning dealing with 16 “mahraganat” artists, on top of the list was Hamo Becca, Magdi Shata, and “all “mahraganat” bands and all those who are not members of the syndicate of musical professions”.¹⁸ The decree also included a notification to all governmental and non-governmental facilities, tourist facilities, and hotels to implement that decree, stating that “whoever violates this decree will be legally accountable”.

The syndicate threatened to imprison the “mahraganat” singers listed in the decree in accordance with Article 5 bis of Law No. 35 of 1978, which is a violation of the Egyptian constitution that guarantees freedom of expression and artistic creativity, as Article 67 states that “Freedom of artistic and literary creativity is guaranteed. The State shall encourage arts and literature, sponsor creative artists and writers and protect their productions, and provide the means necessary for achieving this end. No lawsuit may be initiated or filed to stop or confiscate any artistic, literary, or intellectual works, or against their creators except by the Public Prosecutor. No freedom restricting sanction may be inflicted for crimes committed because of the publicity of artistic, literary or intellectual product”.

Hani Shaker’s battle with the “mahraganat” singers, specifically Hamo Becca, dates back to the last quarter of 2018, when the Syndicate of Musical Professions canceled two concerts for Becca “to preserve public taste.” In November 2018, the syndicate’s lawyer filed a legal report against Becca while he was preparing to hold a concert in Alexandria, in which the syndicate accused him of

17. A copy of the request by the Syndicate of Musical Professions.

18. A copy of the decree by the Syndicate of Musical Professions.

“singing without a permit and corrupting public taste”. The report, which carried the number 13812 for 2018 administrative Dekheila, was referred to Misdemeanor Court, which issued a ruling to imprison Becca for a period of three months for practicing the profession of singing, and holding an audio-visual concert, without obtaining a license from the Ministry of culture.

On April 10th, 2019, a court upheld a ruling to imprison Becca for two months for holding a concert without a license. On April 30th, 2019, Becca’s objection of the imprisonment sentence was accepted and he was released. It is noteworthy that Becca went, in February 2019, to the Syndicate of Musical Professions to get a permit to sing, but it refused to grant him active or associate membership or even temporary permit to sing.¹⁹

- **Academic Freedom:**

The crackdown associated with the September demonstrations included the arrest of two of the most prominent professors of political science at Cairo University: Hazem Hosni and Hassan Nafaa, as the report pointed out in the digital rights section. In addition to being accused in the case 488, 2019 Supreme State Security, the Supreme State Security Prosecution interrogated Dr. Hassan Nafaa, pending a new case, on October 5th, 2019, after a legal complaint was submitted against him by lawyer Tarek Mahmoud Mohamed.

Nafaa was accused -in case No. 397 of 2019 supreme state security- of participating with a terrorist group knowing its purposes, financing terrorism by receiving funds with the intention of harming the national interest to achieve the purposes of a terrorist group, deliberately broadcasting false news, statements and rumors that would disturb public security, intimidate people and harm the public interest, and using an account on the internet for the purpose of committing the previous crime. The last tweet by Nafaa on Twitter was just before he was arrested, in which he demanded the departure of President Al-Sisi because “Continuing the absolute rule of Sisi will lead to disaster” the tweet said.

Prior to the September demonstrations, some university professors were prosecuted for expressing their opinions on working conditions in universities. On September 4th, 2019, the South Zagazig Prosecution ordered the imprisonment of Tarek El-Sheikh, a professor at the Faculty of Law at Zagazig University, pending Case No. 518 of 2019, in which he was accused of promoting false information and concepts. El-Sheikh was arrested from his home on August 31st, 2019, because he wrote on social media using the hash tag “Egyptian scientists are angry” which was launched by some faculty members. The campaign “Egyptian scientists are angry” aims to increase the salaries of faculty members.

19. AFTE, Accessed on October 14th, 2019. Link: <http://bit.ly/2nKeSIR>

Third: Recommendations on the protection of freedom of expression:

At the end of this report, AFTE makes a number of recommendations aiming to encourage local and international stakeholders to continue dialogue with the Egyptian authorities in order to commit to protecting freedom of expression and freedom of information. The recommendations are as follows:

- The Egyptian authorities should immediately release those arrested in connection with the September demonstrations, including journalists, creators, university professors and political activists, and stop prosecuting citizens for expressing opinions opposing the current regime.
- The Egyptian government should unblock websites, especially journalistic and news websites that were blocked in the wake of the September demonstrations, including Al Hurra and BBC.
- The Supreme Council for Media Regulation should stop the interference of the security services in the material published in newspapers, which lead to the prevention of opinion articles.
- The Syndicate of Musical Professions must ensure the freedom of creativity for all artists, stop its practices against “mahraganat” singers, and allow them to sing freely.

Conclusion:

This report addressed the violations that occurred during the third quarter in 2019, on the level of freedom of expression files, and explained the political context witnessed by Egypt in this period, and its impact on the state of freedom of expression.

Through this periodic report, AFTE tries to encourage targeted groups of journalists, innovators, activists and academics to advocate for freedom of expression issues. The association also provides documented information on the state of freedom of expression to assist local and international organizations in their efforts to defend human rights.