



The first quarterly report on the state of freedom of expression in Egypt

(January - March 2022)

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Prepared by AFTE's Monitoring and
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Methodology

This report presents and analyzes the general policies of the Egyptian authorities and their various agencies towards the right to freedom of expression in its various forms, specifically freedom of the press and media, freedom of creativity and artistic expression, freedom of digital expression, academic freedoms, student rights, the right to access information, and finally the right to peaceful assembly and demonstration.

The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) monitors and documents violations in these domains. It also provides legal aid to the victims of these violations through its lawyers at the legal unit.

The report also reviews and analyzes the patterns of violations that were monitored and documented during the period from 1 January to 31 March 2022, according to AFTE's monitoring and documentation methodology.¹

Introduction

During the first quarter of 2022, the Egyptian authorities continued to impose repressive restrictions on the political and civil rights of citizens, foremost of which is freedom of expression in all its forms. They targeted all traditional means of expression, such as peaceful assembly and demonstration, media freedom and artistic creativity, as well as new means such as social media. The authorities intensively targeted social media users over the past four years, aiming to limit the flow of information contrary to official narratives about any events, and to restrict individuals' freedom to share their views on government policies.

During that quarter, AFTE monitored the continued targeting of citizens by the security services, randomly in most cases, after tracking their opposition posts on social media and using pretrial detention as a tool to abuse them. Meanwhile, the judicial authorities actively used the Law on Combating Information Technology Crimes to target female social media users and their assistants under loose claims related to what the prosecution called spreading immorality and debauchery and violating the values and morals of Egyptian society.

The security services did not only clamp down on journalists during the same quarter, but also targeted citizens who published videos about their torture inside a police station in Cairo, after the British newspaper The Guardian published a report on the content of those videos. Instead of launching a serious judicial investigation into the videos, all those who appeared in the clips were presented to the Supreme State Security Prosecution on charges of spreading false news and were remanded in custody.

Regarding the right to peaceful assembly and demonstration, the same quarter

1 AFTE's monitoring and documentation methodology, <https://bit.ly/3EoHwLL>

witnessed the targeting of Coptic citizens who participated in a peaceful assembly calling for the rebuilding of their church, which was destroyed by a fire in 2016.

At the level of legislative authorities, the House of Representatives' Religious Committee agreed - in principle - to amend three articles in the Presidential Decree of Law No. 51 of 2014, which regulates preaching and religious lessons in mosques or the like. The proposed amendments limit the right to discuss religious issues to specialists who have licenses from Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Endowments. They also stipulate that anyone who violates this or violates what the amendments call the "true religious teachings" or "incites sedition" will be imprisoned. The terms used in the amendments pave the way for targeting any religious views contrary to the official ones, especially those broadcast on traditional media or published on social media.

This report is divided into five sections, through which AFTE tries to shed light on the key public policies towards freedom of expression. It also reviews and analyzes the most prominent patterns of violations committed by various agencies against freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly and demonstration.

First section: Legislative amendments ban discussion of religious issues; Security services continue to repress freedom of demonstration



- **House of Representatives' Religious Committee agrees to place new restrictions on "discussion of religious matters"**

On 20 February, the House of Representatives' Religious Committee approved a bill submitted by MP Tarek Radwan and 60 other MPs to amend Articles 1, 2 and 5 of the Presidential Decree of Law No. 51 of 2014 that regulates preaching and religious lessons in mosques and the like². The amendments, which the committee approved in principle, put more restrictions on the right of citizens to express their views on various religious issues, especially via traditional or social media. The amendments paved the way for targeting people of religious beliefs that are different from the official ones. The amendment of Article 2 bans non-specialists and those who don't have a license from Al-Azhar or the Ministry of Endowments from discussing religious matters via various media outlets, including social media.

The amendment of Article 5 stipulates that a prison sentence of no less than 6 months and no more than a year, and a fine of no less than 50,000 pounds and not more than 100,000 pounds, shall be imposed on anyone who "engages in public preaching or religious lessons in mosques, public places, event houses and the like, or speaking about religious matters in the media without a permit or license, or during suspension or withdrawal of the license".

The amendment further stipulates that the penalty shall be doubled in the case of recidivism, and may reach up to hard labor life imprisonment for "anyone who expresses an opinion that is contrary to the true religion, or contradicts its fundamentals or its overall established principles, if that opinion results in spreading sedition or inciting violence among the people of the nation, in violation of the provisions of Article 2 of this law". This opens the door for crackdown on those who express their views on religious matters, including those who are officially licensed, under loose claims that kill diversity and prevent criticism of the prevailing religious ideas.

The amendments also gave sanctity to the Al-Azhar uniform, incompatible with freedom of expression, as they stipulated imprisonment for six months to one year in the case of wearing the uniform by non-Azhar graduates, or deliberately "insulting, deriding or mocking it".

These amendments are in harmony with the general political atmosphere that has prevailed in Egypt over the past nine years, which is based on imposing one opinion and killing diversity and multiplicity of opinions on all issues. Nevertheless, they contradict the positive remarks the Egyptian president made regarding freedom of belief³ during a seminar for launching the national human rights strategy. This confirms that these remarks came in the context of promoting the illusion that the Egyptian regime has adopted new approaches to human rights

2 Nashaat Ali, Parliament's Religious Committee approve law regulating preaching, Masrawy, 20 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3JZkrHk>

3 President Sisi's important speech about freedom of belief and religion, CBC YouTube channel, 11 September 2021, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3jPGS74>

issues.

The amendments come at a time when many are subjected to violations against the background of expressing their opinions on various religious issues. Perhaps the last of these cases is what happened to TV presenter Ibrahim Issa during the first quarter of this year, when the Public Prosecutor referred him to investigation⁴ over views he made during his talk show “Cairo Talk”, broadcast on Al-Qahera Wal Nas TV. In his show, Issa criticized the clergy and sheikhs, stressing that people do not need them at this time. He went on to say that they are promoting fake stories, giving the story of Isra and Mi’raj, also known as the “night journey” in Islam, as an example. He claimed that “Mi’raj”, the Prophet’s ascending to the heavens, was not mentioned in the Islamic heritage books, while clerics selected books that confirmed its occurrence.

- **Restriction of citizens’ right to peaceful assembly and demonstration continues**

With regard to the right to peaceful assembly and demonstration, the security services continue to violate this right. AFTE documented the arrest of nine Copts, namely Mounir Samir Mounir, Remon Mamdouh William, Jid Saad Zekry, Milad Mahrous Tawfiq, Abanoub Magdi Samaan, Gerges Samir Gerges, Shenouda Salib Hosni, Mina Salib Hosni, and Milad Reda Tawfiq, from their homes on 30 January, against the backdrop of a peaceful assembly by dozens of Copts in Ezbet Faragallah village in Minya Governorate. The rally was staged inside Samallut Diocese on 22 January to demand the rebuilding of St. Youssef Abu Sefein Church in the village after it was destroyed by a fire that broke out there in 2016. The cause of the fire has not been known yet, according to a statement published by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights⁵. On the next day, a number of Copts performed their prayers in an open area in the village in an attempt to draw attention to their demand. Then, a priest came and advised them to leave and that a solution to their problem would be reached soon, which the people responded to.

The nine arrested Copts were brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution on 2 and 3 February, in connection with Case No. 65 of 2022 (Supreme State Security Prosecution). The prosecution charged them with participating in a gathering that endangers public security, committing a terrorist act with the aim of disturbing public security, and organizing a gathering that affects public authority. The nine are still held in pretrial detention until the time of publishing this report, according to a lawyer who declined to be named.

Egypt restricts the citizens’ right to peaceful assembly, through Law No. 107 of 2013, known as the “Protest Law”, which was endorsed by former President Adly Mansour in November 2013. Parties and human rights organizations re-

⁴ Joint statement: Human rights organizations call on the Public Prosecution to drop the investigation of Ibrahim Issa, AFTE, 27 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/37usJtt>

⁵ Press release: Copts in Ezbet Faragallah village in Minya Governorate demonstrate to demand the rebuilding of a church.. The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights renews its demand to reconsider the law on building and restoring churches, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 24 January 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3rAFPfT>

jected the law at the time on the ground that it completely restricted the citizens' right to peaceful assembly. Since then, the Egyptian authorities – in accordance with the law – have used force to break up demonstrations and gatherings. The law allows the authorities to prosecute those who call for and participate in demonstrations. It deprives citizens of their right to peaceful assembly and demonstration. Political forces tried to stage demonstration in compliance with the law, but they failed, as the Egyptian authorities refused to approve those demonstrations.

Second section: Media freedom



The usual and repeated patterns of violations against journalists also continued during the first quarter of this year. AFTE documented 7 incidents that included at least 18 violations against journalists and press sources. These included banning some journalists from performing their jobs and suspending others temporarily. In a key incident, a number of citizens and criminal prisoners in the First Al-Salam police station in Cairo were referred to the Supreme State Security Prosecution against the background of a press report published by The Guardian newspaper on a video documenting the torture of some inmates inside the police station. The following are the most prominent patterns of those violations.

The key patterns of violations against media freedom:

- **Media councils continue to restrict the work of media professionals**

The media councils in the country continue to impose more restrictions on media freedom under loose claims and accusations that fall under freedom of expression. AFTE documented two decisions by the Media Syndicate and the National Media Authority against two TV presenters. The first decision, taken by the Media Syndicate, was to suspend the presenter of “The Match” show on Sada Al-Balad TV, Hani Hathout,⁶ and prevent him from appearing on Egyptian screens pending investigation, according to the Syndicate’s statement No. 5 of 2022. The statement said Hathout breached the media code of honour and did not regularize his status with the Syndicate. The statement also mentioned that the Syndicate’s media observatory had documented professional violations and a breach of the media code of honour and the code of professional conduct as well. This came after Hathout criticized the head of Zamalek Club, Mortada Mansour, in response to the latter’s attack on him. On 24 February 2022, head of the Media Syndicate Tariq Saada issued decision No. 7 of 2022 to suspend Hathout for two weeks, starting 25 February. Hathout was interrogated at the Syndicate’s headquarters and admitted that he breached Paragraph 5 of the media code of honour which stipulates respect for the etiquette of media dialogue and avoidance of personal arguments and disagreements. Hathout also violated Article 9 of the code of professional conduct which stipulates the obligation not to engage in media quarrels and not to use publication spaces or display times to raise personal disputes, disagreements or private interests.

The second decision was issued by the National Media Authority on 8 February to suspend the presenter of the “Good Morning Egypt” show on Channel One, Hossam Haddad, from work and refer him to investigation⁷ over his remarks about Al-Ahly’s participation in the FIFA Club World Cup. During an episode of his show, Haddad said Al-Ahly did not represent Egypt in that tournament, but rather represented itself. He wondered whether the Zamalek fans should encourage Al-Ahly football team, then he said they should not. The National Media Authority considered Haddad’s remarks as fuelling football hooliganism.

- **Journalists and media outlets prevented from coverage**

On another level, prevention from coverage is one of the most routine violations that have been committed against freedom of the press over the past seven years. It completely contradicts freedom of the press and the right of citizens to know and access information, especially in those cases in which government officials are accused. On 15 February 2022, AFTE documented a decision taken by the Cairo Court of Appeal to ban publication on the “Zamalek apartment antiquities” case, in which former councillor Ahmed Abdel-Fattah and his wife are

6 Mina Ghaly, The media syndicate: Preventing Hani Hathout from appearing on any media outlet inside Egypt, Masrawy, 19 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3xCEd8Y>

7 TV presenter Hossam Haddad referred to investigation and suspended from work, Akhbar Al-Youm Gate, 8 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3xH9Pua>

being tried on charges of trafficking in antiquities. The case has been under the spotlight for a long time, after hundreds of artifacts were found inside an apartment owned by Abdel-Fattah in Cairo's Zamalek neighbourhood.⁸

In the same context, Al-Shorouk website on 23 January quoted a security source⁹ as saying that the Cairo Criminal Court prevented journalists from entering the courtroom to cover the trial of health officials on charges of corruption. The trial involved the director of the office of Minister of Health Hala Zayed and her ex-husband. Since then, Zayed has been on a long sick leave, and the Minister of Higher Education was appointed as acting health minister temporarily.

On 1 January 2022, the security forces guarding the Giza Criminal Court prevented journalists from attending the trial session of a man accused of killing four people in a car accident in the Sheikh Zayed neighbourhood. Al-Shorouk website stated that it was the court president who prevented the journalists.¹⁰

- The State Security Prosecution charges at least 11 people with spreading false news against the backdrop of a report by The Guardian daily

The security services and judicial authorities did not only target journalists over their work, but they also targeted those who the press wrote about. AFTE documented the appearance of at least 11 people before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Fifth Settlement neighbourhood during the period from 16 February to 1 March. They were involved in Case No. 95 of 2022 (Supreme State Security Prosecution), according to the lawyer of one of the defendants. They face charges of helping a terrorist group achieve its goals, financing that group, spreading false news, and possessing a means of publication in an illegal way and in places not specified by law.

Those people, most of whom are imprisoned in criminal cases, were arrested after the British daily The Guardian published a report on 24 January about two videos showing the torture of a number of criminal prisoners inside the First Al-Salam police station in Cairo at the hands of police officers. The Interior Ministry denied the allegations in a Facebook statement, saying that the videos were "fabricated" with the aim of spreading rumors and lies. It noted that the videos were published on a social media account belonging to a fugitive terrorist.

A number of criminal prisoners had filmed several videos showing a number of inmates revealing bruises on their bodies, accusing the police station's officers of beating them with sticks. Another video showed two prisoners suspended on a metal net with their arms tied behind their back. The videos, copies of which

8 Shaima Ammar, Court issues gag order in the case of the Zamalek apartment antiquities, Al-Shorouk Gate, 15 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/37rnNFK>

9 Mustafa Al-Minshawi, Defendants in the case of health ministry bribery arrive at the Criminal Court.. Journalists denied entry, Al-Shorouk Gate, 23 January 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3KRnpPo>

10 Mahmoud Abdel Salam, After journalists were denied [entry].. Karim El-Hawary's trial in the Sheikh Zayed car accident case postponed to 5 February, Al-Shorouk Gate, 1 January 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/38UKcM5>

were obtained by The Guardian, were published on a YouTube channel called "First Al-Salam police station leaks".

The State Security Prosecution levelled accusations against all those who appeared in the videos, including those who were released in the criminal case. Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry arrested all those outside the prison to whom the videos were sent.

No judicial body has moved to investigate the incident, something which shows that the judicial authorities have been a tool in the hands of the security services over the past seven years to punish anyone who deviates from their directions or exposes their repressive practices against citizens.

Third section: Digital rights



The Egyptian authorities continued during the first quarter of this year to prosecute online users for publishing political content against the government policies, and also for publishing content violating what the Public Prosecution called the "Egyptian family values". AFTE documented at least 12 incidents containing 13 violations, most of which were arrests of citizens on charges of spreading false news and publishing posts against the government policies. Meanwhile, the judicial authorities committed four violations against content creators. In this regard, the Court of Appeal upheld a prison sentence against human rights defender Amal Fathy, against the background of posting a video on YouTube criticizing the spread of harassment in Egypt and the failure of the Egyptian au-

thorities to act seriously to confront this phenomenon.

The violations committed during the first quarter do not differ from those committed over the past five years. The Egyptian authorities intensively target online users, especially after the former succeeded in closing the traditional public spaces, such as the right to peaceful assembly, and restricted media freedom completely through a number of repressive measures. In order to nationalize the cyberspace, the Egyptian authorities commit many types of violations, which we are going to review below.

The key patterns of violations committed during the first quarter:

- **Individuals targeted for expressing their opinions on social media**

The security services continued to track posts on social media that criticize the government policies. AFTE documented the arrest of member of the Constitution Party Haitham Al-Banna from his home in Al-Manial neighbourhood in Cairo on 30 January¹¹. Al-Banna did not appear before any investigation body for nine days until he appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Fifth Settlement, in connection with Case No. 41 of 2022 (Supreme State Security Prosecution). The prosecution charged him with joining a terrorist group and spreading false news on Twitter. The prosecution faced him with publications related to the anniversary of the January 2011 revolution. He was remanded in custody for 15 days, but was released later.

In the same context, a police force arrested Mahmoud Hassan Shoukry, 51, from his home in Alexandria on 22 January¹². Shoukry was illegally detained at the National Security headquarters in Smouha, where he was interrogated about several posts he posted on Facebook. He remained in detention until he appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution on 21 February in connection with Case No. 93 of 2022 (Supreme State Security Prosecution). He was remanded in custody for 15 days. The prosecution charged him with joining a terrorist group, spreading false news supporting political activists such as Alaa Abdel Fattah and Ahmed Douma, as well as misusing social media.

The tracking of social media posts that criticize government policies or expose repressive security practices is not limited to activists or those affiliated with opposition parties or organizations. Rather, the random tracking of posts also include citizens who do not have any political activities. AFTE documented the targeting of pro-government individuals for publishing posts about their living conditions or violations they were exposed to.

On 8 January 2022, a police force arrested accountant Ihab Saeed Ahmed Saafan, 43, from his home in Sharqia Governorate¹³. Saafan was subjected to en-

11 For writing on Twitter: Haytham Al-Banna imprisoned in Case No. 41 of 2022 (State Security) on charges of joining a terrorist group and spreading false news, Egyptian Front for Human Rights, 9 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3k94Hat>

12 Testimony from his lawyer

13 Testimony from his lawyer

forced disappearance for about three weeks. During his interrogation at the National Security headquarters in Zagazig about his activities on Facebook and Twitter, he was subjected to beating and electric shocks, according to his lawyer. Saafan appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Fifth Settlement on 31 January 2022, in connection with Case No. 41 of 2022 (Supreme State Security Prosecution). He faced charges of joining and financing a terrorist group and spreading false news. Saafan denied the accusations, stressing his support for President Sisi and that he had previously elected him and had no political activity.

The arrest of journalist Adel Morsi Ahmed of Al-Manar International newspaper¹⁴ revealed to a large extent the tendency of the Egyptian authorities to track down the social media activity of even pro-government activists, after some criticized the performance of some police personnel. Ahmed said during the investigation that his newspaper publishes news about state projects and achievements, in addition to some social, artistic and sports news, and it has all security approvals and legal permits. He noted that he is a strong supporter of President Sisi and wrote many articles against the Muslim Brotherhood group. However, this did not help him when he published a distress call on Facebook to security officials in Assiut Governorate. He noted in his call that police officers at Dayrout police station in Assiut built a fabricated case against him. However, he was surprised on 28 January that a police force arrested him from his home. Two days later, he appeared before the State Security Prosecution, in Case No. 41 of 2022 (Supreme State Security Prosecution), facing charges of joining a terrorist group and spreading false news on Facebook with the aim of distorting the image of the state.

In another context, the security services continue to stop citizens, especially in Tahrir Square and downtown Cairo, to search their mobile phones and social media accounts and arrest them if any anti-government posts are found. AFTE documented the arrest of Imad Al-Sayed Ali Radwan on 28 January 2022 after police officers stopped him in the vicinity of Tahrir Square¹⁵, searched his mobile phone and found anti-government posts on his social media accounts. The next day, Radwan was presented to the Qasr al-Nil Prosecution, in Case No. 599 of 2022 (Misdemeanor Qasr al-Nil), facing charges of promoting a terrorist group on social media. On 28 February, Radwan was released under the guarantee of his place of residence. The Qasr al-Nil Prosecution appealed against Radwan's release, but the Basateen Misdemeanor Court rejected the appeal the next day.

- Crackdown on female social media users and their assistants continues under the pretext of protecting the values of Egyptian family

On the other hand, the judicial authorities continue to target content creators under claims of spreading immorality and debauchery and violating the morals

¹⁴ Testimony from his lawyer

¹⁵ AFTE's legal aid unit

and values of Egyptian society. AFTE documented the issuance of prison sentences against two female content creators and the assistant of one of them during the first quarter of the year. On 15 February, the North Giza Juvenile Prosecution referred Nancy Ayman, also known as Moka Hegazy, to the Juvenile Court on charges of practicing prostitution with men without discrimination in return for money and offering herself in a public manner that contained temptation to practice debauchery. On 24 February, the Giza Juvenile Court sentenced Hegazy to three years in prison, one year for the first charge and two years for the second.¹⁶

On 8 July 2021, a police force arrested Hegazy while she was in Hosary Square in the Sixth of October City, against the background of what the security services called immoral video clips she posted on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

A police report carrying No. 5679 of 2021 was filed, and the Public Prosecution began questioning Hegazy on accusations that included infringing on public morals and inciting vice by publishing videos on social media. Hegazy was held at a care home pending investigation.

Hegazy, 16, is active on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, where she posts dancing videos. She interacts with comments from her followers on these platforms.

In the same context, the Economic Misdemeanors Court in Alexandria decided to reduce the prison sentence issued against TikTok influencer Yasmine Abdel Razek, also known as the “Hohos girl”, and her assistant Osama¹⁷ to be two years with a fine instead of three years. Last September, the court sentenced Abdel Razek to three years in prison and ordered her to pay a fine of 200,000 pounds, after she was charged with inciting immorality, breaching social morals, misusing social media, and broadcasting indecent videos for profit.

On 26 July 2021, an Alexandria police force arrested Abdel Razek and her videographer, Osama, on charges of posting videos violating the public morals and values. Several lawsuits were filed against Abdel Razek. One of these was filed by lawyer Ashraf Farahat, who launched a campaign called “purification of society”. His lawsuit, No. 85101, was submitted to the Public Prosecutor’s technical office.

The campaign against female content creators, which has targeted 19 individuals so far, dates back to the beginning of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Egypt in early 2020, as subsequent lockdowns – where citizens had to stay at home – resulted in an increase in the use of social media platforms, especially TikTok. The Egyptian authorities, represented in the Public Prosecution and the General Administration for Morality Investigations, took advantage of the pandemic to impose more red lines on the citizens’ online content. They targeted a number of online users under allegations of spreading immorality and debauchery and infringing on public morals and values.

16 AFTE’s legal aid unit

17 AFTE’s legal aid unit

In its campaign against content creators, the Public Prosecution relied on a set of laws enacted by the authorities with the aim of imposing restrictions on internet users and monitoring their content. These laws mainly included Law No. 175 of 2018 on combating information technology crimes, which stipulates prison sentences and fines over moral crimes that are difficult to know their elements or verify their authenticity. These crimes include the so-called infringement on family values and principles. Moreover, Law No. 180 of 2018 regulating the press and media gave powers to the judicial and police authorities as well as the Supreme Council for Media Regulation to block websites and social media accounts for “national security” reasons or in cases of spreading false news, or contempt of heavenly religions or religious beliefs.

- **The Court of Appeal upholds the imprisonment of human rights defender Amal Fathy against the backdrop a video posted on Facebook**

On 11 January 2022, the Court of Appeal upheld the imprisonment of human rights activist Amal Fathy for one year in Case No. 7991 of 2018, known in local media as the “Harassment Case”. The Maadi Misdemeanor Court had previously issued a two-year prison sentence and a fine of 10,000 pounds against Fathy in December 2018, according to a statement issued by seven Egyptian human rights organizations, including AFTE.¹⁸

A police force arrested Fathy in May 2018 after searching her home and tampering with its contents. Hours after a long investigation with Fathy, the Maadi Prosecution decided to remand her in custody for 15 days pending investigation, accusing her of posting a video on social media that the prosecution deemed as spreading false rumours and “inciting the overthrow of the ruling regime”. This came after Fathy posted a video on Facebook in which she expressed her anger after being harassed by a public servant inside a government agency. She accused the authorities of being lenient towards the perpetrators of the crime.

Two days after her arrest, Fathy was interrogated again before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in connection with a new case that carried No. 621 of 2018 on charges of joining a terrorist group and using the internet to incite terrorist acts and spread false news. She was also questioned about the activities of her husband, the executive director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF). In December of the same year, the Cairo Criminal Court ordered her release. However, the Maadi Misdemeanor Court sentenced her to two years in prison and fined her 10,000 pounds in the case related to the videos that she published about the harassment incident.

¹⁸ Human rights organizations: We reject the verdict issued against human rights activist Amal Fathy and demand a pardon from the Egyptian President, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 13 January 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3xDsYwY>

Fourth section: Freedom of creativity



AFTE documented eight violations in the file of freedom of creativity during the first quarter of the year. These included the continued restrictions imposed by the Syndicate of Musical Professions on mahraganat (festival) singers, and the Court of Appeal's move to uphold the Syndicate of Acting Professions' decision to write off actors Khaled Abul-Naga and Amr Waked against the backdrop of their political activity in opposition to the Sisi regime. Meanwhile, the management of the Cairo International Book Fair prevented several publishing houses from participating in the 53rd edition of the exhibition for various reasons, and sometimes without reason. Moreover, film director Hosni Saleh was arrested¹⁹ on charges of spreading false news against the backdrop of a Facebook post in which he said unidentified gunmen attacked the crew of the series "Helm Al-Asmarat" during the filming and stole some filming equipment.

The key patterns of violations:

- **The Syndicate of Musical Professions continues its war against new genres of music**

The Syndicate of Musical Professions, headed by Hani Shaker, continues its war on the new genres of music, especially the popular mahraganat songs. AFTE documented two violations committed by the Syndicate during the first quarter of the year. The first was its decision to suspend mahraganat singer Omar Kamal and refer him to investigation²⁰ on 15 February over what he said on social media.

¹⁹ Hamdi Dabash and Yousry Badri, the director of "The Dream of Al-Asmarat" series arrested on charges of spreading false news, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 10 January 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3L8MvJy>

²⁰ Mahmoud Zaki, The Syndicate of Musical Professions suspends mahraganat singer Omar Kamal from singing, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 15 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3xDqJtO>

Kamal, in a live broadcast on his Facebook page, replied to a comment by a follower who said: “Hani Shaker will punish you”. Kamal replied: “No one can punish me, my dear; no one knows how to punish me. I and my band are working everywhere.”²¹ In response, the Syndicate issued a statement²² rejecting “any transgression or insult against an artistic symbol like Hani Shaker who influenced the Egyptian song throughout its history, was a contemporary of legends, and remained a symbol of giving and dedication”. It noted that Shaker had a “fruitful role in preserving the originality and primacy of the Egyptian song”.

The Syndicate added that it rejects “the appearance of any Egyptian singer on social media in an inappropriate manner in terms of speaking, movement and utterance of words that have suggestive and immoral connotations that degrade the value of Egyptian artists”. The Syndicate, thus, clearly deviated from its role in protecting the rights of singers and not imposing any moral guardianship on them. The incident also indicates that the Syndicate and its head seem to have adopted unprofessional policies that reflect a clear and personal hostility towards that type of music.

In the same context, the management of the Zamalek Theatre backtracked on its decision to hold a concert for mahraganat singer “Muslim”, which was scheduled on Friday 11 March. The move came after the undersecretary of the Syndicate of Musical Professions announced that the Syndicate would submit an official report to the police about the Theatre’s violation and might ban the Syndicate members from dealing with the Theatre.

The Theatre management said the Syndicate had asked it to cancel the concert because Muslim did not regularize his status in the Syndicate.²³

- The “Book Fair” prevents at least one publishing house from participation and terminates the presence of another

In another context, the 53rd edition of the Cairo International Book Fair was launched on 26 January. The exhibition is considered a season for publishing houses and libraries, as they intensify their cultural production in order to take advantage of the state of popularity created by the exhibition. However, the General Book Authority prevented the Asir al-Kutub publishing house from participating in the exhibition, and ended the presence of the River Nile Center for Publishing six days after the start of the exhibition, without giving any reasons.

The exhibition management rejected the Asir al-Kutub publishing house’s participation, without giving any reason. The move came after a media campaign accused the house of publishing some books and publications authored by Isla-

21 The video that caused the suspension of Omar Kamal: Hani Shaker cannot punish me, Fil-Fan website, 15 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3EvCDHE>

22 Ibid

23 Mustafa Hamza, Muslim’s concert at Zamalek Theatre officially cancelled, Masrawy, 3 March 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3OonrQO>

mists. Officials from the house told the Cairo 24 website²⁴ that they told the General Book Authority that they had reviewed all the religious heritage publications issued by the house to ensure that they are free of any ideas that support "religious extremism" and removed a large number of those books from its electronic platform.

The house issued a statement on 25 November²⁵ asking the Interior Ministry and the bodies concerned to investigate the accusations levelled against it over the last period. The statement, shared by the house director Mohamed Shawky on his Facebook page, noted that Asir al-Kutub is an Egyptian publishing house and those in charge of it are loyal to Egypt in the first place. It added that the house is committed to the Egyptian national line and respects the philosophy of the Egyptian government.

Head of the Egyptian Publishers Association Said Abdo told the Raseef 22 website²⁶ that Asir al-Kutub was prevented from participating in the fair because of the accusations it and its owner levelled against the General Book Authority on Facebook, which resulted in referring the house to the Association's disciplinary committee.

In the same context, the River Nile Center for Publishing issued a statement on Facebook six days after the exhibition's launch announcing the termination of its presence in the book fair, based on an oral decision they were informed of by the fair's management. The statement added that the exhibition management did not hand the center any official memoranda providing a justification for the decision, and the center was not asked to sign any papers or minutes. It noted that no official from the exhibition management contacted the center, and all attempts to understand and clarify that decision failed.

- **The Administrative Judiciary Court upholds the Syndicate of Acting Professions' decision to write off Khaled Abul-Naga and Amr Waked against the background of expressing their views**

On 5 January 2022, the Second Circuit of the Administrative Judiciary Court rejected an appeal submitted by actors Khaled Abul-Naga and Amr Waked against the Syndicate of Acting Professions' decision to terminate their membership of the Syndicate.²⁷

The Syndicate issued a statement²⁸ on 27 March 2019 announcing the cancel-

24 Mahmoud Shoman, Full details of banning Asir Al-Kutub from participating in the Book Fair... and the 1% negotiations, Cairo 24 website, 1 January 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3OpjLhK>

25 The house's statement published on its manager's Facebook account, 25 November 2021, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3McUCoL>

26 Yasmine Mohamed, Closure, banning and confiscation, Cairo Book Fair repeats its customary behaviour, 1 February 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3rBMBSu>

27 Ahmed Abdel-Hadi and Ahmed Al-Gaafari, The Administrative Judiciary Court upholds the cancellation of Amr Waked and Khaled Abul-Naga's membership of the Syndicate of Acting Professions, Youm7 website, 5 January 2022, last visited on 15 April 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Oooss6>

28 Statement – The Syndicate of Acting Professions cancels the membership of Amr Waked and Khaled

lation of the membership of the two actors against the backdrop of their stances against the current ruling regime. This came shortly after the two actors attended a session in the US Senate which discussed the human rights situation in Egypt. The Syndicate accused the two actors of high treason, seeking the help of foreign parties against the public will, and supporting the agenda of conspirators against the security and stability of Egypt, according to the statement.

The Syndicate took its decision without conducting any internal investigations, in violation of Law No. 35 of 1978 regarding the establishment of unions and the Federation of Artistic Syndicates, which obligates all administrations of unions to conduct the necessary investigations before imposing any penalty on any of their members.

Article 63 and 64 of the same law obligate the administrative authority to form a committee to undertake the investigation before issuing any penalty against union members. They also obligate the administrative authority to form a five-member disciplinary committee, with the union member having the right to choose one of the five members. The law further stipulates that the union member shall be informed of the date of investigation, acknowledging their right to bring a lawyer and witnesses, while guaranteeing the right to appeal the committee's decisions before an appellate disciplinary board with more experienced members, which has not been implemented.

Moreover, the Syndicate's decision to terminate the actors' membership came in violation of Article 12 of the same law, which identified the cases of cancelling the membership. The case in question was not one of them. The Syndicate levelled serious accusations against the two actors, such as high treason and seeking the help of foreign parties against the public will, just because of the actors' political views that contradict those of the Syndicate's management.

Fifth section: Academic freedom



On the level of academic freedom, AFTE documented continued crackdown on Egyptian academics, by taking criminal and disciplinary measures against them against the backdrop of expressing their opinions on issues including those related to their academic fields. One of the key incidents in this regard was the ruling issued by the Cairo Criminal Court on 31 March 2021 that sentenced head of the Radio and Television Department at the Cairo University's Faculty of Mass Communication Ayman Mansour Nada to one suspended year in prison and ordered him to pay a fine of 100,000 pounds, in Case No. 9840 of 2021 (Fifth Settlement Misdemeanors). Nada faced charges of insulting member of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) Rania Hashem and using a Facebook account to commit crimes.

The court acquitted Nada of all other accusations, which included spreading false news about the Egyptian media and insulting the SCMR and a number of its members. It also rejected the lawsuit filed by the SCMR head Karam Gabr against Nada.

These accusations came against the backdrop of some Facebook articles in which Nada criticized the media scene in Egypt and the way it has been run over the recent years. So, some repressive measures were taken against Nada. He was arrested in September 2021, but was later released on 17 November of the same year pending investigation into Case No. 23 of 2021. He faced charges of insulting and slandering a number of Cairo University leaders, against the background of some articles he published on Facebook that accused the university

administration of corruption. Moreover, the Cairo University referred him to several disciplinary hearings, which carried numbers 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 of 2021, on the same charges.

Meanwhile, two female academics, who refused to be named, were referred to investigation³⁰ on 17 March on charges of using social media to publish phrases that cast doubt on state institutions and national projects, accusing the government of failing to deal with the current problems and concealing corruption, and accusing the security services of committing crimes of enforced disappearance against citizens. The move was a clear violation of the two academics' right to freedom of expression.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Egyptian authorities continue to violate citizens' right to freedom of expression and access to information in different ways. Over the past few years, they have intensively targeted citizens for expressing their views on social media, which have become the last outlet available to citizens to express their opinions. So, AFTE put forward the following recommendations:

- Law No. 175 of 2018 on combatting information technology crimes should be cancelled.
- The Public Prosecutor should immediately release those held in pretrial detention for expressing their views in all forms, and stop targeting citizens for the same reason.
- The judicial rulings issued against female social media users on charges of promoting immorality and debauchery and violating the values and morals of society should be revoked.
- The House of Representatives should reject the proposed amendments to the Presidential Decree of Law No. 51 of 2014 regarding the regulation of preaching and religious lessons in mosques and the like.