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2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Egypt

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Egypt during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; transnational repression against individuals in another country; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including enforced disappearances and torture; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict by government-supported tribal militias; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and the enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence within the territory of a state and on the right to leave the country; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on and harassment of domes.

international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation/cutting; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; de facto criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct between adults, including enforcement of other laws to punish that conduct; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

In most cases, the government did not comprehensively investigate or prosecute allegations of human rights abuses, including most incidents of violence by security forces, as well as corruption, contributing to an environment of impunity.

Section 1.

Respect for the Integrity of the Person

A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings while making arrests or holding persons in custody. Local and international rights groups reported instances of persons tortured to death in prisons and detention centers.

Despite the existence of mechanisms for investigating complaints of security force abuses, both through the prosecutor's office and the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), multiple groups reported investigations of deaths in custody often either concluded that death occurred from natural causes or did not include a forensic examination. The Public Prosecutor's Office charged, prosecuted, and convicted perpetrators in a small number of cases, but lack of accountability remained a serious problem.

In July, local and international rights groups called for an investigation into the death in custody of Mahmoud Tawfik, whom they reported security forces had assaulted June 25 while he was in custody on terrorism charges in Alexandria and later tortured to death at an undisclosed location. They stated officers had confiscated security camera footage in the area following the incident. According to a Ministry of Interior statement closing the case on July 9, Tawfik died due to "acute circulatory failure."

In March, the family of economist and researcher Ayman Hadhoud requested the public prosecutor reopen the investigation into the circumstances surrounding his 2022 death. In April, the prosecutor declined the request based on a previous determination Hadhoud died of a chronic cardiac condition and there was no basis for a criminal case, according to public statements. Local and international human rights groups assessed Hadhoud had died as a result of torture, based on analysis of photographs of his body.

Italian court officials set a date of February 2024 for the trial in absentia of four Egyptian security officers accused of kidnapping and killing Italian doctoral student Giulio Regeni in 2016, after Italy's top court ruled in September that the trial could proceed. A court had suspended the trial in 2021 for lack of proof the defendants received formal notification of the proceedings as required under Italian law.

Human rights groups and the families of some deceased prisoners claimed prison authorities denied prisoners access to potentially life-saving medical care and in some cases denied requests to transfer the prisoners to the hospital, leading to deaths in prison. A report by a local monitoring organization stated 35 prisoners and detainees died as a result of abuse or medical neglect during the year.

B. DISAPPEARANCE

International and local human rights groups reported large numbers of enforced disappearances, alleging authorities utilized this tactic to intimidate critics.

Authorities sometimes detained individuals without producing arrest or search warrants. According to local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), authorities detained many of these individuals in unspecified National Security Agency (commonly referred to as NSS) offices and police stations, but they were not included in official registers of detainees. Authorities routinely held detainees incommunicado and denied their requests to contact family members and lawyers for periods ranging from a few days to several years.

In January, a task force of nine independent domestic human rights organizations submitted a midterm report as part of the UN Universal Periodic Review process describing enforced disappearances as "systemic and widespread." The submission identified the NSS as committing the majority of violations and following a pattern of detaining prisoners courts had ordered released, holding them incommunicado, and later rearresting them under similar or identical charges.

On February 20, six leading domestic human rights groups denounced the government's use of enforced disappearances and the public prosecutor's failure to investigate them. The statement followed the appearance at the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) of at least 40 detainees whom authorities had held incommunicado for up to three years. According to the rights groups, many of the detainees were subjected to torture while in NSS custody. The statement criticized the public prosecutor for failing to investigate complaints regarding the disappearances and dating their arrests from their first court appearance rather than when they were detained. The rights groups condemned these actions as failing to uphold the law and contributing to impunity for the security services.

Local media and rights group documented the enforced disappearances of scores of defendants. In September, Ahmed Hamdi al-Sayed Suleiman, known as "Ahmed Gika," was charged, after being held incommunicado between June and August, with "joining a banned group" and "spreading false news," according to his lawyers' statements to local media. The lawyers and local rights groups denounced Gika's detention as unjustified and illustrative of pervasive and abusive enforced disappearance practices.

C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES

The constitution prohibited such practices against "a person whose movements were restricted or whom authorities had detained or arrested." The law banned torture to induce a confession from a detained or arrested suspect but did not account for mental or psychological abuse against persons whom authorities had not formally accused, or for abuse occurring for reasons other than securing a confession. While the law authorized prison officials to use force against prisoners who resisted orders, it prohibited all officials from "employing cruelty" or "causing bodily harm" under any circumstances. Nonetheless, there were numerous reports officials employed torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment.

Local and international rights organizations reported abusive practices were systemic, asserting police and prison guards regularly abused detainees, including children, through beatings, electric shocks, psychological abuse, and sexual assault, including as part of interrogation. A leading domestic human rights group focusing on torture and mistreatment of prisoners and detainees documented approximately 2,700 violations of prisoners' rights, including torture and intentional medical neglect, in prisons, police stations, and detention centers through the first three quarters of the year.

In October, eight international and local human rights groups released a report concluding torture represented part of an institutionalized culture of violence used against detainees and enabled by a legal framework focused on counterterrorism, incommunicado detention, and widespread impunity. The report documented the use of torture against lawyers, journalists, bloggers, academics, human rights defenders, activists, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals, among others.

Multiple human rights groups indicated authorities subjected prisoners accused of crimes related to political or security matters to physical and verbal abuse and prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement. In January, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued a statement of concern regarding Ahmed Mohamed Amasha, most recently detained in June 2020 and facing charges of joining and financing a terrorist group. The statement expressed concern regarding Amasha's physical and psychological condition following alleged torture, including severe beatings, electric shocks to his genitals, and prolonged isolation.

Human rights organizations stated the Public Prosecutor's Office ordered forced anal and vaginal "exams" of detainees, primarily in "debauchery" cases against transgender women and men who had sex with men. Civil society organizations further alleged that the authority to undertake these abusive practices stemmed from internal guidelines rather than law, and that "evidence" obtained from the "exams" could only be used against detainees, never to exonerate them. Authorities regularly used the "results" of forced anal exams as evidence against defendants, despite the opinions of independent international medical experts that there was no medical or evidentiary basis for such conclusions.

According to human rights activists, security force impunity was a significant problem. The Prosecutor General's Office (for Ministry of Interior actions) and the Military Prosecution (for military actions) were responsible for pursuing prosecutions and investigating whether security force actions were justifiable.

The NCHR's most recent report, covering December 2020 to May 2023 and issued in June, indicated 4.5 percent of more than 2,000 complaints related to violations of civil and political rights involved allegations of torture or mistreatment, and noted the NCHR received responses from the Ministry of Interior and Public Prosecutor's Office for all such complaints. In a small number of cases, reported abuse led to investigations and charges against security officials.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions were harsh and life threatening due to widespread overcrowding and lack of adequate access to medical care, proper sanitation and ventilation, food, and potable water.

Abusive Physical Conditions: According to domestic and international NGOs, prison and detention center cells were overcrowded. Human rights groups estimated detention facilities held 80,000 convicted prisoners and 40,000 pretrial detainees. The groups noted these were estimates because the government did not regularly publish official statistics. In February, nine human rights group called on the government to publicize prison and detainee information as a critical tool to monitor prison conditions.

There were multiple reports from human rights organizations and family members that detainees undertook hunger strikes to demand improved conditions, including better sanitary conditions, access to medical treatment, and family visitations. Inmates often relied on outside visitors for food and other supplies or were forced to purchase those items from the prison canteen at significantly inflated prices, according to local NGOs.

Reports that guards abused prisoners, including juveniles in adult facilities, were common. Prison conditions for women were reported to be marginally better than those for men.

Local and international human rights groups assessed that harsh conditions and prison overcrowding contributed to the number of deaths in prisons and detention centers, and that pretrial detention beyond the two-year legal limit further contributed to prison overcrowding.

While the government opened multiple modern prisons in recent years, rights groups documented practices that made conditions difficult for inmates in the new facilities. According to these reports, detainees and prisoners were denied access to health facilities, subjected to prolonged solitary confinement, confined to their cells without exercise or sunlight, were unlawfully refused family visitations, denied personal items supplied by family members, and forced to remain in cells lighted 24 hours per day. In March, a group of rights groups called for an investigation into reports of multiple suicide attempts at the Badr Correctional and Rehabilitation Center and called for a review of policies and conditions for prisoners. In September, six rights groups called on prison authorities to adhere to international standards and national law following reports these problems persisted at the Badr and other facilities.

Attorneys for jailed poet Jalal al-Behairy reported he attempted suicide in September. Behairy went on a hunger strike in May to protest conditions at Badr Correctional and Rehabilitation Center, including 24-hour lighting in cells, denial of visitations, lack of access to writing materials, and his prolonged arbitrary detention. He completed a three-year sentence for “spreading false news” and insulting the military in 2021 but was immediately detained again, without being released, in a new case for spreading false news and joining a terrorist organization. A local rights group described the incident as a reflection of the “clear disregard for prisoners’ basic rights.”

In August, authorities responded to a January inquiry from a panel of UN experts calling on the government to allow access to adequate medical care for former presidential candidate and Strong Egypt Party leader Abdel Moneim Abou Fotouh, who had a history of heart trouble. The UN experts expressed concern regarding Abou Fotouh being held in solitary confinement for more than four years and the deaths of other prisoners after concerns regarding their health were registered with the government. The government reported the prosecutor’s office examined Abou Fotouh’s medical condition and determined he was receiving all necessary treatments. The report also claimed he had not been held in solitary confinement, which rights groups and local activists rejected on the basis of first-hand accounts.

Administration: The government did not sufficiently investigate most allegations when complaints were submitted, according to prisoners’ and detainees’ lawyers and rights organizations. Prisoners could request investigation of alleged inhuman conditions, but NGO observers claimed prisoners were reluctant to do so due to fear of retribution from prison officials.

In September, the public prosecutor announced the completion of what it described as a “sudden inspection” of the Wadi al-Natroun Correctional and Rehabilitation Center to examine living conditions, access to exercise facilities, and readiness of medical facilities to meet the needs of prisoners and detainees. According to statements by the prosecutor’s office, the team verified adherence to laws and provisions under the constitution.

According to human rights groups, TV presenter and labor rights advocate Hala Fahmy told a court during a pretrial detention renewal hearing in July that prison officials refused to register her official complaints, as required by law, of assaults and other rights abuses against her in detention following her April 2022 arrest for outspoken criticisms on social media of the government’s economic policies.

In February, a local rights group called for the release of activist Aya Kamal, who faced retribution after reporting sexual harassment by a woman warden during pretrial detention. Kamal was arrested in July 2022 on charges of “spreading false news,” “misuse of social media,” and “joining a banned group,” after calling for an end to degrading treatment of prisoners and to the practice (known as “recycling”) of bringing new or additional charges against detainees to prolong their pretrial detention beyond legal limits. The rights group said the case represented some of the wider challenges that detainees and prisoners faced in the country, highlighting repeated charges on the same insufficient evidence; poor prison conditions; sexual and other forms of harassment and abuse; impunity; and a lack of due process.

Independent Monitoring: The government did not permit monitoring by independent nongovernmental observers except on a limited basis. The Ministry of Interior organized limited tours of the new Wadi al-Natroun and Badr facilities for foreign correspondents, journalists, and delegations from various embassies and international organizations to observe prison facilities, but rights groups criticized these tours as not realistically representing prisoners’ experiences. Multiple rights groups called for independent monitoring, including by the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as establishing an independent monitoring authority and transferring prison administration from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Justice.

Improvements: In March, the government opened three new correction and rehabilitation facilities in Cairo and Sohag and announced the closure of 15 older prisons, whose inmates were transferred to the newer facilities.

D. ARBITRARY ARREST OR DETENTION

The constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, but local and international rights groups reported widespread and frequent arbitrary arrests and detentions.

According to the constitution, detainees had the right to challenge the legality of their detention before a court, which had to decide within one week if the detention was lawful or otherwise immediately release the detainee. According to international and local human rights groups, authorities regularly deprived individuals of the right to challenge their detention, and when challenges did occur courts did not issue timely judgments.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law required that police act based on a judicial warrant except where persons were apprehended in the process of committing a crime, but there were numerous reports of arrests without a warrant.

Ordinary criminal courts and misdemeanor courts heard cases brought by the prosecutor general. Arrests for criminal offenses under the penal code occurred with warrants issued by a public prosecutor or judge. Human rights lawyers and advocates reported judges and prosecutors rarely used available alternatives for releasing defendants pending trial, such as home detention or requiring periodic appearance at a local police station, and even in cases where bail was ordered, some defendants claimed judges imposed unreasonably high bail.

The law provided criminal defendants the right to counsel promptly after arrest and obliged the court to provide a lawyer to indigent defendants, but defendants often faced administrative problems, and in some cases political or legal obstacles, to exercising these rights and often could not secure regular access to lawyers.

Prosecutors had the authority to order four days of preventive detention in misdemeanor and felony cases. After the four-day period, investigative judges could extend the detention for up to 45 days in 15-day increments. After the 45-day period, prosecutors could request an appellate court to extend the detention in 45-day increments.

In cases under the jurisdiction of the SSSP, prosecutors could renew preventive detention in increments of 15 days up to a total of 150 days. After the 150-day period, prosecutors could refer the case to a criminal court panel of three judges to renew the detention in increments of 45 days. Multiple reports from lawyers and rights groups stated the SSSP conducted “perfunctory” detention renewal hearings regularly for hundreds of defendants in a single court session and did not provide detainees the meaningful ability to defend themselves. Lawyers also alleged authorities did not give them access to clients at detention centers or before hearings attended by video conference. In January, a rights group issued a report on pretrial detention renewals in terrorism circuit courts showing detentions were renewed in 98.6 percent of the more than 25,000 hearings during 2022.

Human Rights Watch and local rights groups criticized the expansion of pretrial detention hearings by video in July, arguing the change further isolated detainees and limited their ability to meet and speak freely with lawyers or report abuses while in detention.

Authorities regularly detained defendants from the initial investigation through all stages of criminal judicial proceedings. The law limited the combined periods of prosecutor- and court-

ordered detentions prior to trial to six months in cases of misdemeanors, 18 months in cases of felonies, and two years in cases involving the death penalty or life imprisonment. After pretrial detention reached its legal limit without a conviction, the law required authorities to release the accused person immediately. Rights groups claimed authorities regularly detained accused persons beyond the pretrial detention limit.

According to human rights groups, authorities sometimes added charges involving the death penalty or life imprisonment, such as “joining a banned group seeking to undermine state institutions,” to cases related to freedom of expression or other politically motivated cases. Such a move provided a basis for authorities to hold individuals otherwise charged only with nonviolent crimes to prolong the duration of their trial or rearrest them into new cases to circumvent the two-year pretrial detention limit.

Arbitrary Arrest: The constitution prohibited arrest, search, or detention without a judicial warrant, except for those caught in the act of a crime. These rights were suspended during a state of emergency, the most recent of which expired in 2021. There were, however, frequent reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions. Local activists and rights groups stated at least hundreds of arrests did not comply with due-process laws.

In April, rights groups criticized the detention of Hani Soliman, a physician and former pharmaceutical marketing manager, following social media posts commenting on the lack of transparency regarding President Sisi’s finances and suggesting the president would not accept defeat in elections. The SSSP charged Soliman with “joining a banned group,” “spreading false news,” and “misuse of social media.” Rights groups condemned Soliman’s arrest and continued pretrial detention as arbitrary and due solely to his expressing his opinion. Soliman remained in detention at year’s end.

In October, the SSSP ordered the detention of human rights lawyer Hoda Abdel Moneim pending investigation on the final day of a previous five-year sentence. Human rights groups stated Abdel Moneim faced charges of joining and financing a terrorist group in a 2020 case and argued prosecutors should have investigated these accusations while she was incarcerated. Rights groups also pointed out Abdel Moneim faced the same charges in her previous trial, being acquitted on the financing charge and completing the sentence for joining a terrorist group. She remained in detention at year’s end.

Pretrial Detention: The government did not provide figures on the total number of pretrial detainees, and nongovernmental estimates of the number of pretrial and preventive detainees varied widely. Rights groups alleged authorities excessively abused pretrial

detention and preventive detention against individuals accused of nonviolent crimes, especially those involving human rights advocacy or criticism of the government. The NCHR stated it coordinated efforts to address complaints of pretrial detainees. Large backlogs in the criminal courts contributed to protracted periods of pretrial detention. Human rights groups criticized the practice of bringing additional or similar charges after the detention limit was reached, thereby “recycling” or “rotating” the accused person into indefinite pretrial detention.

On August 1, four months after the release of al-Jazeera news network journalist Hisham Abdelaziz following nearly four years in pretrial detention, the network issued a statement condemning the lengthy detention of its correspondents Rabee al-Sheikh and Bahauddin Ibrahim since 2021 and 2020, respectively. Al-Jazeera described their detentions as violations of fundamental freedoms and called for the men’s immediate release. The network also objected to the two journalists’ July redesignation on the terrorism list for five years, which carried sanctions including travel bans, asset freezes, and passport cancellation.

In October, a local rights group documented Hamed Sedeek’s four years in pretrial detention on charges of joining a terrorist group, “spreading false news,” “and misusing social media.” According to the group, authorities commonly brought such accusations against activists and government critics without concrete evidence. In April, Sedeek refused to attend a pretrial detention renewal hearing following the death of his spouse, leading to an altercation involving guards and Sedeek’s cellmates Mohamed al-Baqer, Ahmed Douma, and Mohamed “Oxygen” Ibrahim. All four were injured during the incident and placed in solitary confinement, according to the rights group.

E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

The constitution provided for an independent judiciary, but courts sometimes appeared to lack impartiality, especially in cases involving criticism of the government, and arrived at politically motivated outcomes or without individual findings of guilt, according to multiple human rights groups.

The law imposed penalties on individuals designated by a court as terrorists, even without criminal convictions, including travel bans, asset freezes, passport cancellation, and loss of professional credentials and political rights. The government prosecuted individuals for alleged membership in or support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which it designated a terrorist group in 2013. Individuals could appeal their terrorist designation directly to the country’s highest appeals court.

In April, the UN Human Rights Committee's fifth Universal Periodic Review on Egypt expressed concern regarding suspects held in custody for long periods without charges and also noted proceedings in terrorism cases lacked fundamental procedural safeguards to ensure fairness, especially in mass trials and those involving the death penalty. The report also expressed concern that authorities used broad and vague definitions in the terrorism law to restrict fundamental freedoms and silence government critics.

In April, Ahmed Sabry Nassef was recycled into a sixth case on similar charges of joining a terrorist group, which his lawyers and rights groups denounced as a violation of due process and denial of his right to a fair trial. Nassef remained in detention since 2017 despite receiving two release orders and three acquittals in previous trials, including as recently as February.

Trial Procedures

The law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary often failed to uphold this right.

The law presumed defendants to be innocent, and authorities usually informed defendants promptly of charges against them. Defendants had the right to be present at their trials. Attendance was mandatory for individuals charged with felonies and optional for those charged with misdemeanors. Human rights lawyers and organizations stated defendants sometimes were not informed of the charges against them during interrogations and detentions. These groups also observed defendants were not always present during legal proceedings, particularly during renewal hearings for pretrial detention.

Civilian criminal and misdemeanor trials were usually public. Authorities routinely prevented representatives of civil society, media, foreign embassies, and family members from attending trial and pretrial detention hearings. Human rights groups stated detained or imprisoned defendants regularly were denied access to lawyers. Rights groups alleged routine violations of due process during trials as defendants were not permitted to call or question witnesses or present evidence, as the law required.

According to human rights groups, defendants sometimes faced difficulties in getting sufficient information concerning the charges and accusations in their case, long delays before commencing a trial, pro forma hearings limiting their ability to mount an effective defense, and limited communication with their attorneys while in detention. Legal observers and rights groups indicated authorities sometimes denied lawyers access to detained clients

and did not always provide them the required access to evidence and case files prior to the beginning of proceedings. Rights groups claimed authorities sometimes denied lawyers access to their clients' hearings and trials in state security emergency courts.

Human rights lawyers observed evidence was often not clearly connected to or sufficient to substantiate the charges against their clients, such as which banned group a client was accused of joining or what "false news" the client allegedly spread.

The law permitted individual members of the public to file criminal complaints with the prosecutor general, who was charged with deciding whether the evidence justified referring the charges for a trial. Legal observers reported, however, that due to unclear evidentiary standards, vague definitions of crimes such as terrorism, and broad interpretations of the legal provisions, the Prosecutor General's Office investigated and referred for trial the majority of cases, regardless of the strength of the evidence. Rights groups also criticized the prosecutor's office for not sufficiently investigating complaints alleging violations of defendants' rights.

Military courts were not open to the public. The military judiciary had wide discretion to curtail defendants' rights on public security grounds and regularly did so. Military courts often tried defendants in a matter of hours, frequently in groups, and sometimes without access to an attorney, leading lawyers and NGOs to assert military courts did not meet basic standards of due process and undermined fair-trial assurances. Defendants in military courts had the right to consult an attorney, but sometimes authorities denied them timely access to counsel. According to rights groups, authorities permitted defendants in military trials visits from their attorneys only once every six months, in contrast with the civilian court system, where authorities allowed detained defendants attorney visits every 15 days.

The constitution stated civilians could not stand trial before military courts except for specific enumerated crimes linked to the military. A number of national security cases continued in military courts under an emergency court system established during the state of emergency that expired in October 2021. The law did not provide for appeals of emergency court verdicts, and only the president or his delegate could ratify, annul, or amend the verdicts or order a retrial. Public information was limited concerning military trials, which were difficult to monitor because authorities usually subjected media to restraining orders. Rights groups and lawyers stated defense attorneys in military trials had difficulty gaining access to their clients and to documentation related to the cases.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were reports of significant numbers of political prisoners and detainees. Humanitarian groups were not permitted access to political prisoners or detention centers. The government routinely charged political prisoners and critics with “spreading false news,” “misuse of social media,” and terrorism-related charges for exercising their freedom of expression.

In March, an emergency court sentenced members of the organization Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms to sentences ranging from five years to life in prison on terrorism-related charges, including joining, financing, leading, and supporting a terrorist group. A group of nine leading human rights groups denounced the convictions for Ezzat Ghoneim, Hoda Abdel Moneim, Mohamed Abu Hariarah, and Aisha al-Shater, among others, as falling short of fair trial standards, subjecting the defendants to torture or abusive treatment, and being politically motivated due to the activists’ human rights work.

In August, authorities released economist Omar al-Shenety, detained in connection with the “Hope Cell” case in 2019 following a meeting to form the Alliance of Hope political group to run in parliamentary elections. While several prominent members of the group received presidential pardons in 2022, a number of others remained in pretrial detention, including Mohamed Ahmed Saad. Authorities detained Saad in May 2019 and he faced charges of joining and financing a terrorist group, “spreading false news,” and “misuse of social media” in the case.

In September, Reporters without Borders called for the release of Mohamed “Oxygen” Ibrahim as he began his fifth year of imprisonment since being detained in 2019 and later convicted of “spreading false news.” The two years Ibrahim spent in pretrial detention were not counted toward his four-year sentence. Rights groups decried his trial in the emergency courts as improper and unfair and criticized the decision not to credit his pretrial detention as a violation of the law. In the National Dialogue (a forum called by the government and intended to bring together stakeholders to discuss political and social matters) launched on May 3, participants repeatedly called for his release.

In November, a group of 34 local and international rights groups called on the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to designate longtime activist Alaa Abdel Fattah’s continued imprisonment for much of the last decade as a case of arbitrary detention and contrary to international law. Abdel Fattah, a blogger and longtime activist, was convicted of “spreading false news” in 2021 and sentenced to five years in prison in an emergency court trial. As of year’s end, Abdel Fattah remained imprisoned.

Amnesty: The government periodically issued pardons of prisoners on national and religious holidays, sometimes including individuals whose cases human rights organizations considered to be politically motivated. Government statements and local press reported authorities pardoned and released thousands of prisoners throughout the year, but only a small number of those pardoned were individuals detained on politically motivated charges. Several high-profile political prisoners received presidential pardons in July including Patrick Zaki (detained from February 2020 to December 2021, and again in July before release) and Mohamed al-Baqer (detained since 2019), and in August for Ahmed Douma (detained since 2013). The Presidential Pardon Committee announced releases of several hundred individuals, some of whom human rights organizations characterized as political prisoners, throughout the year. Rights groups reported many of these prisoners were being held in pretrial detention and had not yet been convicted.

F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: Rights groups and media reports indicated the government regularly used threats, harassment, and surveillance of individuals outside the country as well as arrests and pressure on family members to temper the activities of critics based abroad.

In April, the U.S.-based NGO Freedom Initiative (now the Middle East Democracy Center) issued a report documenting the threats of violence and online harassment of Egyptian activists based in the United States. The report asserted harassment and surveillance took place at academic conferences and political events. Multiple rights groups criticized the arrest, prosecution, or prolonged detention of family members of activists based abroad.

Misuse of International Law Enforcement Tools: There were credible reports the government misused international law enforcement tools for politically motivated purposes against individuals located outside the country. In May, human rights groups denounced the arrest of blogger and activist Abdelrahman Tarek, known as “Moka,” in Lebanon. According to Tarek’s account of the brief detention, he was interrogated regarding the Egyptian government’s interest in him and his designation as a “terrorist.” Multiple rights groups asserted the arrest was at the behest of the Egyptian government as an attempt to silence critics based abroad.

In October, a group of 18 human rights groups demanded Turkey (Türkiye) refrain from deporting activist Ghada Najibe following her arrest. In 2019, the Giza Criminal and Supreme

State Security Emergency Court sentenced Najibe in absentia while living in Turkey to five years in prison for “spreading false news,” and in 2020 the government moved to revoke her nationality for “endangering national security from abroad.” In October, she was imprisoned in Turkey without access to her family or attorney for two weeks. According to Najibe’s family, Turkish security officials pressured her to stop criticizing the Egyptian government on social media prior to her arrest. Rights groups called for her unconditional release and emphasized Turkey had an obligation not to return individuals to a situation where they could face torture or other human rights violations.

Efforts to Control Mobility: There were reports the government denied consular services to or revoked identity documents of certain citizens abroad, jeopardizing their legal status. In March, Human Rights Watch issued a report citing the cases of more than two dozen journalists, activists, and dissidents living abroad who were denied birth certificates or renewal of identity documents necessary to work, travel, and live legally outside the country. The report noted these individuals feared returning home to seek these services because of arrest or persecution.

G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION

In February, residents of Warraq Island clashed with security forces following demonstrations against the planned redevelopment of the island located in the Nile north of Cairo. In March, the Administrative Court rejected a lawsuit by residents seeking to block expropriation of their land.

Residents of Arish on the north Sinai coast repeatedly demonstrated against the demolition of their homes to accommodate the expansion of the local port. A local rights group claimed the project would affect 20,000 persons. Demonstrators and advocates stated compensation was inadequate or never materialized, leaving some at risk of homelessness, and criticized local officials’ lack of transparency and communication during the process.

H. ARBITRARY OR UNLAWFUL INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE

The constitution prohibited arbitrary or unlawful interference with the privacy of the home, correspondence, telephone calls, and other means of communication, but there were widespread reports the government regularly failed to respect these protections. Security agencies regularly placed human rights defenders, political activists, journalists, foreigners,

writers, and others under surveillance; monitored their private communications; screened their correspondence, including email and social media accounts; examined their bank records; searched their persons and homes without judicial authorization; and extrajudicially confiscated personal property. Ahead of planned protests or demonstrations, police reportedly stopped young persons in public places and searched their mobile phones for evidence of involvement in political activities or criticism of the government.

The constitution provided for the right to privacy, including on the internet, and for the confidentiality and “inviolability” of postal, telegraphic, and electronic correspondence; telephone calls; and other means of communication, but the law allowed the president to issue written or oral directives to monitor and intercept all forms of communication and correspondence, impose censorship prior to publication, and confiscate publications.

Surveillance by the government was a significant concern for internet users. There were credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority, including using cyberattacks to gain access to devices and accounts belonging to human rights defenders, other civil society members, and actual or perceived critics of the government.

Multiple rights groups and media reported authorities regularly monitored and exploited social media and internet dating sites to identify, harass, arrest, and abuse LGBTQI+ individuals. In March, the dating application Grindr sent a message to users in the country warning them police were using profiles on the application to target members of the LGBTQI+ community in so-called catfishing incidents. The warning followed reports of dozens of arrests.

In September, Citizen Lab and local and international media reported declared presidential candidate Ahmed Tantawy’s cell phone had been hacked multiple times between May and September using Predator spyware from the Cytrox company, and alleged the government was behind the hacking even as the government simultaneously harassed Tantawy’s campaign staff and family members.

Judicial warrants were required for authorities to enter, search, or monitor private property, but law enforcement did not always adhere to these requirements. The government’s surveillance operations lacked transparency, potentially violating the constitution’s privacy protections.

I. CONFLICT-RELATED ABUSES

Government security forces, terrorist organizations, and other armed groups (including militias and criminal gangs) clashed in North Sinai throughout the year. The government imposed restrictions on local residents' travel outside North Sinai and general movement within North Sinai Governorate and severely restricted media access to North Sinai, although residents were allowed to return to some areas and enjoyed increased freedom of movement during the year. Rights groups and media reports assessed the greatest threats to civilians came from improvised explosive devices left in civilian areas by ISIS-Sinai Province and as a result of exchanges of gunfire between government security forces, ISIS-Sinai, and other armed groups. There were no official, published data on the number of civilian victims of terrorist violence during the year.

In May, Human Rights Watch and a local rights group criticized the detention without charges of women and girls allegedly connected to ISIS for periods of a few days to 30 months. According to the rights groups' report, some of the women were subjected to torture and incommunicado detention after experiencing rape and forced marriage at the hands of ISIS militants.

In September, a local rights group released a report regarding the impacts of the conflict on access to education and damage to infrastructure in Sinai. The report concluded government forces, progovernment militia, and ISIS used educational facilities for military purposes. The organization noted military forces withdrew from a number of schools.

Killings: Terrorist and other armed groups targeted the armed forces and civilians with gunfire, improvised explosive devices, and other tactics. In May, a local rights group reported an explosive device left by ISIS killed a young boy and wounded two other youths in the Tuffaha area of western Sinai.

Child Soldiers: The Secretary of State determined Egypt supported progovernment tribal militias in the Sinai that recruited or used child soldiers during the reporting period of April 2022 to March 2023. See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 2.

Respect for Civil Liberties

A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government frequently did not respect this right. Human rights defenders, journalists, activists, and others regularly faced criminal prosecution on charges that observers assessed as retaliation against criticism of the government.

The law required newspapers to print their issues at licensed printing houses registered with the Supreme Council for Media Regulation. According to the law, news websites had to host their servers in the country, newspapers had to submit 20 copies of each printed issue to the council, and websites and television outlets had to keep copies of all published or broadcast material online for one year and submit a copy of their published or broadcast material to the council every month. The law also prohibited any recording, filming, or interviews in public places with the intention of broadcasting them on a media outlet without a permit issued by the council.

Freedom of Expression: Citizens expressed their views on a wide range of political and social topics, but the government regularly investigated, detained, and prosecuted individuals for expressing political views or criticism, using charges such as “spreading false news,” supporting a banned group, incitement of violence, insults to religion, insults to public figures and institutions such as the judiciary and the military, or “abuse of public morals.” The government used social media posts as evidence in many cases, according to multiple human rights lawyers.

The law provided a broad definition of terrorism, to include “any act harming national unity or social peace.” Human rights observers noted authorities regularly used the ambiguous definition to stifle nonviolent speech and nonviolent opposition activity through criminal investigations and prosecutions.

In January, authorities arrested four social media content creators who posted a satirical video regarding a woman visiting her fiancé in detention. “The Visit” garnered seven million views on Facebook, according to media reports, and the creators were charged with supporting a terrorist group, “spreading false news,” and “misusing social media.” Local rights groups denounced the case as indicative of the government’s unwillingness to tolerate criticism even in the form of satire. The content creators were released from pretrial detention in September, but their criminal case remained pending at year’s end.

In September, 28 human rights groups called for the release of activist Mohamed Adel following his conviction for “spreading false news.” The groups criticized the conviction and four-year sentence as stemming solely from Adel’s exercise of freedom of expression and

lawful activities as a human rights defender. The groups maintained that Adel's sentence undermined fair trial guarantees and demonstrated a disregard by the government for the rule of law. Adel remained in detention at year's end.

Violence and Harassment: According to media reports and local and international human rights groups, authorities regularly harassed and intimidated human rights defenders, activists, opposition figures, and journalists during the year.

In February, a local rights group issued a report summarizing the hazards facing journalists who were previously detained for their work. Thirteen journalists said they faced restrictions on their freedom of movement within the country and fear of rearrest at police checkpoints, prolonged precautionary release measures – including spending nights at police stations – difficulty finding work, and travel bans and asset freezes. The cumulative effect of the restrictions created difficulties in returning to their personal and professional lives despite being released and generated fears of returning to detention at any time because the underlying cases remained open.

In June, the head of the Journalists' Syndicate, Khaled al-Balshy, called on the government to release all journalists jailed for their reporting. A media freedom organization stated that 20-25 journalists remained in detention on various charges connected to their work at year's end.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media,

Including Online Media: The constitution allowed "limited censorship in times of war or public mobilization." Independent media expressed a variety of views but with significant restrictions, and official censorship occurred. The constitution, penal code, and media and publications law regulated media conduct. The government regulated the licensing of newspapers and controlled the printing and distribution of most newspapers, including private newspapers.

The law designated the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) as an independent body with members appointed by the president to regulate the media sector, also overseeing both the National Media Authority (for broadcast outlets) and the National Press Authority (for print outlets). The SCMR issued licenses for media outlets and websites, had the authority to block websites, and monitored media funding and content. More than 20 state-owned media outlets broadly supported official state policy. The National Press Authority held the power to appoint and dismiss editorial leadership of state-owned print outlets. The governmental Egyptian Radio and Television Union appointed the heads of state-owned radio and television channels. Both state-owned and private media (including television and online news sites)

occasionally broadcast and published mild criticism of government policies, but dominant media narratives supported the president and his policy initiatives. The law considered websites and social media accounts with at least 5,000 subscribers to be media outlets, required them to pay a licensing fee, and granted the SCMR broad discretion to block their content.

Multiple rights groups and independent media reported various types of censorship. In September, a local rights group published a report concerning restrictions on media freedom. The group cited government media ownership, licensing restrictions, website blocking, and detention of journalists as directly censoring local independent media and causing self-censorship among some journalists. The report highlighted the negative impact of restrictions on free expression in multiple fields, including digital content production and social media use, academia, media and the press, and artistic expression.

Police arrested several journalists for covering politically sensitive topics. Some of those arrested were released, while others remained in detention at year's end. The government's targeting of independent news outlet *Mada Masr* was particularly aggressive. On March 1, prosecutors referred three reporters from *Mada Masr* to criminal trials, following charges filed in 2022 for "spreading false news," misusing social media, and defaming members of the progovernment Nation's Future Party. The defendants, as well as *Mada Masr's* editor in chief, who was charged with operating a website without a license, remained free on bail. The case had not gone to trial as of year's end. On May 24, an administrative court rejected *Mada Masr's* lawsuit against the SCMR challenging the denial of an application for an operating license. An appellate court rejected the outlet's appeal on December 19. On October 29, the SCMR officially blocked *Mada Masr's* website for six months (which was already blocked) and referred a case against the news outlet to the public prosecutor for charges of "practicing media activities without a license" and "publishing false news without checking its sources." The SCMR cited as justification a story *Mada Masr* had published discussing potential displacement of Palestinians into the country as a result of the conflict in Gaza.

Media rights organizations stated the government blocked hundreds of websites and virtual private network services, including *Mada Masr* since 2017 and *al-Manassa* since 2018. Rights groups and media freedom organizations condemned the blocking of additional websites. On January 25, authorities blocked the website of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies hours after it published a joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council as part of the country's midterm Universal Periodic Review. On June 15, media freedom organizations

denounced the blocking of online news sites *Masr360* and *al-Soulta al-Rabi'a* and called on authorities to end censorship in the country.

The constitution required public parliamentary sessions, but the government did not broadcast or publish the deliberations of the House of Representatives or Senate. At year's end, the Second Circuit of the Administrative Court had not yet ruled in a lawsuit brought by a human rights lawyer challenging this practice.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law criminalized libel, slander, and defamation. Rights groups accused government authorities of weaponizing libel and slander laws to silence critics and activists. In September, multiple human rights groups called for the release of publisher and opposition figure Hisham Kassem following his detention and conviction on charges of libel, slander, and verbally assaulting police officers. As of year's end, Kassem remained in prison serving a six-month sentence. Rights groups decried a rising trend of authorities and courts relying on citizens' allegations of insults, slander, or other vaguely worded charges to target political opponents and critics of the government.

The law did not criminalize blasphemy explicitly, but it punished "disdaining and disrespecting" any of the "heavenly religions" (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) with six months' to five years' imprisonment or fines of at least 500 Egyptian pounds (EGP) (\$16). Authorities frequently prosecuted alleged contempt of Sunni Islam or Christianity. The law penalized "violating the family principles of Egyptian society" with a minimum imprisonment of six months and a fine of 50,000-100,000 EGP (\$1,615-3,230). According to civil society organizations, the government often invoked the vague term "family principles" to punish perceived blasphemy. On February 23, a misdemeanor court in Alexandria sentenced a TikTok content creator using the account name "al-Prince al-Masry" ("Egyptian Prince") to three years in prison for insulting Christianity via several videos in which he burned the Bible, smashed a cross with slippers, and insulted Jesus.

National Security: The law allowed government censors to block the publication of information related to intelligence and national security. The government maintained hotlines for members of the public to report "false news" in either traditional or social media that allegedly endangered state security. The law imposed a fine between 5,000 and 20,000 EGP (\$162-\$648) on any person who "intentionally publishes...or spreads false news to undermine national security."

Rights groups and lawyers asserted the government abused terrorism charges to target and deter government critics.

On April 15, authorities charged activist Yehia Hussein Abdel-Hady, the former spokesperson of the Civil Democratic Movement, with “spreading false news” and “recidivism.” Abdel-Hady had been convicted of the same charge in 2022 after spending three and one-half years in pretrial detention. According to local media and rights groups, the latest charges stemmed from a series of Facebook posts criticizing the government and the National Dialogue and calling for additional prisoner and detainee releases, including for alleged members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Internet Freedom

The constitution prohibited the government from “arbitrarily” interrupting, disconnecting, or blocking citizens’ use of all forms of internet communications, but the government regularly engaged in these activities.

The government tightly controlled internet infrastructure and fiber-optic cables and monitored social media accounts and internet usage. While the law tasked the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, a government agency, with regulating telecommunications services and internet service providers, law enforcement agencies also acted to restrict or disrupt individuals’ access to the internet. The public prosecutor investigated and brought charges against individuals accused of posting material deemed “insulting.”

The law criminalized the use of the internet to “promote ideas or beliefs that call for terrorist acts” or to “broadcast what is intended to mislead security authorities or influence the course of justice in relation to any terrorist crime.” The law also authorized the public prosecutor and investigators to monitor and record online communications among suspects in terrorism cases for a period of 30 days, renewable in 30-day increments. The law did not specify a maximum period for this surveillance.

The law broadly empowered investigating authorities to order the blocking of any website whose content they determined was unlawful or “poses a threat to national security or endangers the security or economy of the country.”

Freedom House’s *Freedom on the Net* report for 2023 rated the country “not free” and stated internet freedom and the rights of internet users were severely constrained. According to the report, website blocking, removal of content, criminal penalties, harassment, and surveillance

contributed to high levels of self-censorship among internet users. The report also noted that website blocking was part of a wider crackdown of freedom of expression.

On April 2, security forces arrested fashion model Salma al-Shimy at Cairo airport upon her arrival from the United Arab Emirates for allegedly posting indecent photographs and videos online that “incited debauchery.” A court convicted al-Shimy of filming and broadcasting obscene videos online in exchange for money and sentenced her to two years in prison with a fine of EGP 300,000 (\$9,690), in what some activists denounced as a pattern of prosecuting young women social media influencers with “morality” charges. An appeals court canceled the prison term and reduced the fine to EGP 100,000 (\$3,230) in November.

In May, the Court of Cassation declined to hear an appeal for TikTok influencers Sherifa Rifaat, known as “Sherry Hanim,” and her daughter Zumoroda, stating it did not have jurisdiction in the case. The court of appeals reduced their sentences from six to five years following complaints they had “incited immorality” and “spread obscenity” by posting videos on social media of themselves dancing.

Local and international media rights organizations reported the government blocked hundreds of websites, including more than 130 news websites. The blocked sites included international NGOs, local human rights NGOs, and numerous virtual private network services. Some blockages appeared to respond to critical coverage of the government or to disrupt antigovernment political activity or demonstrations. Media reported the websites of the newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm* and BBC Arabic were temporarily blocked in April following their reporting on Egyptian soldiers captured during the conflict in Sudan.

B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

The government routinely restricted the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution provided for freedom of assembly “according to notification regulated by law.” The law included an expansive list of prohibited activities, authorizing the Ministry of Interior to prohibit or curtail planned demonstrations. Domestic and international human rights organizations asserted the law did not meet international standards regarding freedom of assembly. A government-imposed exclusion zone prohibited protests within 2,600 feet (790 meters) of vital governmental institutions.

The law prevented the conditional release of those convicted of crimes relating to freedom of assembly, among other crimes. On May 30, the Court of Cassation ruled defendants convicted for participating in illegal demonstrations could be dismissed from their jobs for cause. Lawyers and rights groups objected to the ruling, noting authorities rarely issued permits for public demonstrations, rendering participation in lawful protests and the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly all but impossible.

In most cases, the government rigorously enforced the law restricting demonstrations, in some instances using force, including in cases of small groups of peaceful protesters.

On May 31, during the counting of ballots for a vote of no confidence against the head of the Engineers' Syndicate, a group of men entered the hall, disrupted the proceedings, destroyed ballot boxes, and attacked participants. Despite social media users' efforts to identify the assailants, who included members of parliament, through video of the incident and complaints filed with the Prosecutor General's Office, authorities made no arrests by year's end. Syndicate members told local media the lack of accountability undermined the freedoms of assembly and association and violated the law.

In October, demonstrations in support of Palestinians in Gaza following the October 7 Hamas attack took place throughout the country and were widely reported initially to have had government approval. More than 100 persons were reportedly arrested for taking part in other unauthorized protests, including in Cairo's Tahrir Square and in Alexandria, according to local and international media.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provided for freedom of association, but the law significantly restricted this right.

The law criminalized the request for or acceptance of "foreign funds, materiel, weapons, ammunition, or other things" by any individual or group from states or local or international nongovernmental organizations "with the intent to harm the national interest." Those convicted could be sentenced to life in prison (or the death penalty in the case of public officials) for such crimes committed during times of war or with "terrorist intent."

On March 27, the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services announced authorities prohibited the group's holding a Ramadan iftar at a local hotel for unspecified "security

reasons.”

On April 11, a new law governing NGO registration went into effect requiring all NGOs doing “civic work” to register and provide extensive data to authorities, including information on founders and planned activities. All NGOs required the approval of the Ministry of Social Solidarity to register, receive funding, or conduct activities. International NGOs required additional approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to register. Rights groups criticized the approval process and stated the law stripped civil society organizations of the right to work independently and monitor human rights violations.

C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, albeit with some exceptions, including the treatment of potential refugees and asylum seekers.

In-country Movement: The government sought to prevent private individuals, journalists, civil society figures, and international organizations from entering North Sinai, a designated military zone, on safety grounds, which it stated were necessary restrictions in response to long-running counterterrorism operations.

According to local human rights organizations, security forces set up checkpoints in downtown Cairo and other locations around the anniversaries of street protests and conducted searches, including of mobile devices, and arrests without warrants.

Foreign Travel: The constitution stated that “no citizen may be prevented from leaving the State territory,” but the law prohibited men who had not completed or been exempted from compulsory military service from traveling abroad or emigrating. Authorities routinely imposed travel bans on human rights defenders, activists, journalists, lawyers, and other civil society figures.

Authorities required citizens between ages 18 and 40 to obtain permission from the Ministry of Interior before traveling to 16 countries (Georgia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon,

Libya, Malaysia, Qatar, South Africa, South Korea, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Yemen), but enforcement was sporadic.

The government imposed travel bans on some human rights defenders and political activists who were under investigation or had been formally charged, as well as individuals who had been released from custodial detention. Local human rights groups maintained that authorities used travel bans to intimidate and silence human rights defenders, activists, and critics, and documented cases in which travel bans continued after the conclusion of other legal processes.

Numerous local and international organizations, as well as participants in the National Dialogue, called on the government to close Case 173, known as the “Foreign Funding Case.” In August, the Ministry of Justice stated it was prepared to implement decisions from the investigative judge overseeing the matter and closed the case against the Egyptian Center for the Right to Education in September, the Egyptian Center for Housing Rights in October, and the Land Center for Human Rights in November. The Ministry of Justice stated seven organizations remained charged under Case 173; local activists said approximately 20 defendants remained subject to associated asset freezes and travel bans at year’s end. Human rights groups asserted the continuation of Case 173 was an obstacle to maintaining normal operations, including fundraising, and cast a shadow over their work due to fears of potential criminal prosecution, asset freezes, and travel bans in response to lawful actions by organization staff.

Local and international rights groups called for the lifting of travel bans and asset freezes against several persons affiliated with the NGO Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, including Hossam Bahgat, Gasser Abdel Razek, Karim Ennarah, and Mohamed Basheer. Rights groups also sought the end of travel bans against well-known human rights lawyers Nasser Amin and Hoda Abdel Wahab.

On June 3, authorities prevented human rights advocate Ahmed Samir Santawy from boarding a flight to return to Austria to continue his studies. Santawy was initially arrested in 2021 and convicted for “spreading false news” based on social media posts and sentenced to four years’ imprisonment but had received a presidential pardon and been released after serving 18 months in prison. Amnesty International described Santawy’s travel ban despite his pardon as an example of authorities’ attempts to “silence and control critical voices” standing up for human rights.

E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

The war in Sudan resulted in the arrival of nearly 400,000 refugees, according to official statistics. The government also facilitated entry into the country for foreign nationals during the post-October 7 Gaza conflict, most of whom departed for onward locations.

Access to Asylum: The constitution provided for the protection of “political refugees,” but the law did not provide for granting asylum or refugee status. The government granted UNHCR authority to make refugee status determinations. UNHCR did not register or assist Libyan citizens or Palestinian refugees in the country.

In May, following the April 15 outbreak of hostilities in neighboring Sudan, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi commended the country for “its longstanding commitment to provide a safe haven to those fleeing violence” and appealed for the borders to remain open. In June, the government increased enforcement of conditions for arrival from Sudan, including requiring visas and not allowing children to be added to their parents’ passports. Local organizations expressed concern these restrictions would increase the number of irregular entries into the country. In July, Amnesty International called on all of Sudan’s neighbors to lift entry restrictions and provide safe passage for individuals fleeing conflict. As of December, more than 370,000 Sudanese and 8,500 third-country nationals had entered the country since mid-April.

UNHCR did not have access to detention centers or border areas, absent prior approval by authorities. Authorities generally released asylum seekers registered with UNHCR but frequently did not release detained migrants who may have had a basis for asylum claims, many of whom were Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali, South Sudanese, and Sudanese. Authorities often held detained migrants as unregistered asylum seekers in police stations and sometimes sent them to regular prisons alongside convicted criminals or deported them and did not permit UNHCR access to assess protection needs.

The government did not recognize UNHCR’s mandate to offer services to Palestinians outside of the fields of operations of the UN Relief and Works Agency, reportedly due to its belief that allowing UNHCR registration would negate Palestinian refugees’ right of return.

Refoulement: Authorities reportedly sometimes encouraged unregistered detainees to return to their countries of origin or a neighboring country to avoid continued detention, even in cases where the individuals expressed a fear of return.

As of October, UNHCR had observed a 6 percent increase in detentions from 2022. By October, UNHCR had verified the deportation of 46 registered refugees and asylum seekers. Most detainees and deportees were Sudanese. UNHCR also noted a significant increase in arrests of third-country nationals attempting to cross irregularly into Libya.

In May, authorities reportedly deported a Chadian refugee and community leader to Rwanda after he organized a small protest in front of UNHCR offices over long appointment wait times and inadequate support, according to his public statements and local NGOs.

Several local organizations issued a joint statement in April condemning the government's "relentless campaign against immigrants and students from the Uighur minority." They highlighted the case of Bilal Abdul Karim, a registered asylum seeker detained on charges of currency trading in March. The government released Abdul Karim in August following a resettlement offer from a third country for him and his family.

Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Media, NGOs, and UNHCR staff reported multiple cases of attacks against refugees, particularly women and children. According to UNHCR, refugees sometimes reported sexual and other harassment and discrimination. Refugee women and girls, particularly Sudanese and other sub-Saharan Africans, faced the greatest risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

According to press reports, police conducted security sweeps in neighborhoods known to house refugees and migrants, resulting in increased detentions on the basis of irregular status. Detainees at times reported authorities subjected them to verbal abuse and poor detention conditions.

Employment: The law did not grant or prohibit refugees the right to work. Societal discrimination, particularly against Sudanese and other sub-Saharan Africans, hampered those seeking employment. Refugees who found work often took low-paying jobs in the informal sector, such as domestic servants, and were vulnerable to financial and sexual exploitation by employers.

Access to Basic Services: The law gave most refugees and asylum seekers similar access as citizens to the national education and health systems. A UN report, written in cooperation

with the government in 2022, acknowledged the law was not uniformly applied, and many vulnerable migrants and refugees relied on support from UN agencies to get medical care.

Refugees, in particular non-Arabic-speaking refugees from Sudan and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, faced barriers to accessing some services, including health care and public education. UNHCR provided some refugees with modest support for education and health care, as well as small monthly financial assistance grants for particularly vulnerable refugees. The International Organization for Migration provided additional assistance to particularly vulnerable migrants and individual asylum seekers who were either rejected or still being processed by UNHCR. Several UN agencies and NGOs distributed emergency cash assistance to new arrivals from Sudan to help with essential needs, particularly shelter.

Many refugees and asylum seekers, including some Sudanese, South Sudanese, Yemeni, and Syrian refugees eligible to attend public school, opted for community-based learning centers, due to problems related to lack of identification documents, harassment, and limited capacity of public schools. Refugee children not enrolled in public schools mainly attended refugee-run schools or private schools, or were home schooled. By the start of the new academic year, the Ministry of Education had not yet renewed its decree to allow migrant and refugee children to enroll in public schools, although later in the year it clarified refugees could access public education on the condition that they presented UNHCR documentation and proof of legal residency. Observers reported fee hikes for refugee-run schools that raised concern regarding barriers to education for some refugee children.

The law required government hospitals to provide free emergency medical care to refugees, but many hospitals could not do so. According to a UN report, migrants cited prohibitive costs and discrimination as among the primary reasons for their lack of access to health care. In some cases, hospitals reportedly insisted that refugees provide payment in advance of receiving services or refused to provide services to refugees. One local refugee agency reported some refugees died due to the lack of medical care.

Prior to the start of the war in Gaza, the Ministry of Interior restricted access for international organizations seeking to assist migrants and refugees in Sinai, citing the conflict in the region. The government consistently stated that it rejected the forced displacement of Palestinians to the Sinai Peninsula.

F. STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Not applicable.

G. STATELESS PERSONS

The government and UNHCR lacked a mechanism for identifying stateless persons in the country, including those of disputed Sudanese/South Sudanese nationality or Ethiopian/Eritrean nationality. A majority of the approximately 70,000 Palestinian refugees in the country prior to the war in Gaza were stateless but lacked official recognition of their status.

Media reported some Bedouins were stateless and lived in border areas disputed with Sudan.

Section 3.

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage, but significant constraints on freedom of expression, association, and assembly limited their ability to do so. Domestic and international organizations expressed concern government limitations on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression severely constrained broad participation in the political process.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: The most recent national elections were held in December and widely reported to not be fair and free of abuses and irregularities, including actions inhibiting declared candidates from qualifying for the presidential ballot.

Human Rights Watch and other international and local rights groups criticized the election environment as highly controlled, rendering the process uncompetitive. Opposition candidates seeking to acquire the required 25,000 notarized affidavits of support to appear on the ballot reported their supporters were assaulted, threatened, or otherwise intimidated to prevent them from completing the process. Declared opposition candidate Ahmed Tantawy announced more than 100 campaign volunteers, supporters, and family members had been arrested and detained prior to the deadline to submit the required candidacy documents, in what Tantawy argued was an attempt at intimidation. On October 13, Tantawy suspended his campaign after he was unable to secure the required number of affidavits of support. In November, Tantawy and nearly two dozen of his campaign staff were criminally charged with

illegally circulating endorsement forms based on having distributed copies of the form to citizens.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The constitution granted citizens the ability to form, register, and operate political parties. The law required new parties to have a minimum of 5,000 members from each of at least 10 governorates. The constitution also stated political activity could not be practiced nor a political party formed on the basis of religion or discrimination based on gender or origin. No activity “hostile to democratic principles, secretive, or of military or quasi-military nature” was permitted. Political parties could not be dissolved except by a court judgment. Rights groups asserted existing electoral practices contravened these provisions.

The Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, and the Islamist Building and Development Party remained banned. The leadership of the Strong Egypt Party, including former head Abou Fotouh and deputy Mohamed al-Qassas, remained in prison at year’s end. In January, a local rights organization condemned the trial of Abou Fotouh, al-Qassas, and student leader Moaz al-Sharqawi before an emergency court, alleging the men were subjected to torture and violations of due process and fair trial procedures. The group called on President Sisi not to ratify the men’s lengthy prison sentences of 10-15 years for peaceful political and student activism. The president ratified the sentences in October, according to their lawyers.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: No laws limited participation of women or members of marginalized or vulnerable groups in the political process. Social and cultural barriers, however, limited women’s political participation and leadership in most political parties and some government institutions.

Six women led cabinet ministries, including one Christian woman, and two women served as deputy ministers. There were two Christians among the 27 appointed governors. President Sisi appointed at least 45 judges to criminal and administrative courts, including the first woman appointed to the Disciplinary Court of the State Council, according to announcements in the Official Gazette and local media reports.

Section 4.

Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not consistently implement the law. There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year, sometimes with impunity. Many observers and media reports indicated corruption was a significant problem throughout the public sector.

Corruption: Courts convicted a number of high-level officials, civil servants, and former judges during the year for misuse of public office, bribery, and other related charges.

In May, the Supreme Public Funds Prosecution referred the case of retired Major General Mohamed Youssef, former chairman of the board of the Maritime and Land Transport Holding Company, and Medhat Amin, managing director of the Egyptian Gulf Investment Group, to criminal court for misuse of public office and conspiracy to commit fraud with public funds. According to local media reports, Youssef and Amin conspired to falsify payments for services that were never delivered, misappropriated funds, and blocked lawsuits against the investment group for breach of contract.

Prosecutors indicted Gamal Ibrahim al-Labban, former director of the General Administration of Supplies at the State Council, and five businessmen in the criminal court, on charges of defrauding the government of an estimated 73 million EGP (\$2.35 million) for goods and services that were never delivered, according to local media.

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5.

Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

International and local human rights organizations stated the government did not cooperate with their efforts to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases.

Independent domestic human rights NGOs faced difficulties operating due to reprisals and pressure from the government and security forces. State-owned and state-affiliated media at times depicted NGOs, particularly those that received funds from international sources, as

undertaking subversive and even treasonous activities. Extended delays in gaining government approvals and a restrictive legal environment limited the ability of both domestic and international NGOs to operate. Authorities sometimes allowed civil society organizations not registered as NGOs to operate, but such organizations reported harassment and surveillance, along with threats of government interference, investigation, asset freezes, or closure.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: Human rights defenders (HRDs) and political activists routinely faced governmental and societal harassment and intimidation, including through criminal prosecutions, interrogations by security officers, asset freezes, and travel bans. There were reports of reprisals against HRDs residing outside the country.

In May, lawyers for activist Sherif al-Rouby sought his release from pretrial detention and for the provision of adequate medical care while he remained in detention. Multiple local and international rights groups denounced al-Rouby's rearrest in September 2022, only months after his release from previous pretrial detention. Rights groups criticized his arbitrary detention as indicative of HRDs' constant vulnerability to arrest for exercising their freedom of expression. Prior to his rearrest, al-Rouby spoke publicly regarding the difficulties former political prisoners faced in attempting to reintegrate into society.

In July, seven leading human rights groups highlighted the difficult operating environment and assessed HRDs, lawyers, journalists, opposition figures, artists, and content creators were unjustly imprisoned, disappeared, tortured, placed on the terrorism list, received travel bans and asset freezes, and faced harsh sentences, prolonged pretrial detention, and "recycling" into repeated cases as a result of their legal and peaceful activities.

In August, local rights groups called for the release of translator and activist Marwa Arafa after more than three years in pretrial detention for allegedly joining and financing a terrorist organization. According to a local rights group, the charges stemmed from Arafa's providing resources to the families of detainees. Arafa remained in detention at year's end.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: Authorities did not allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to prisoners or detainees. The government had not acted by year's end on the longstanding request by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to open an office in Cairo.

In September, rights groups renewed calls for the release of Ibrahim Metwally Hegazy, a human rights lawyer who had worked with the United Nations and remained in detention at

year's end.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The law designated the NCHR as an independent council responsible for promoting, developing, and protecting human rights and public freedoms in accordance with the constitution and ratified international agreements. The NCHR's membership was entirely selected by the House of Representatives, which rights groups stated indicated it was de facto controlled by the executive. In April, the UN Human Rights Committee recommended in its concluding observations on the fifth periodic review on the country that the government ensure the NCHR could carry out its mandate "fully, effectively, and independently."

The Presidential Pardon Committee made recommendations for pardons of prisoners and release of pretrial detainees, with the Office of the President or the public prosecutor making final decisions, respectively. Civil society organizations stated they submitted lists of thousands of prisoners and detainees to the committee for consideration. Committee members and other officials stated their efforts led to the release of 400 individuals during the year. According to some NGOs, the number of individuals arrested during the same period on politically motivated charges was two to three times larger.

Other government human rights bodies included the Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights; National Council for Women (NCW); National Council for Persons with Disabilities; National Coordination Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons; National Council for Childhood and Motherhood; Justice Ministry's General Department of Human Rights; Prosecutor General Human Rights Office; State Information Service's Human Rights Unit; Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Human Rights and International, Social, and Humanitarian Department; Ministry of Local Development's Human Rights Unit; Ministry of Social Solidarity's Human Rights Unit; Ministry of Planning and Economic Development's Human Rights Unit; Awqaf Ministry's Human Rights Unit; and human rights units in each of the country's governorates.

Section 6.

Discrimination and Societal Abuses

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape (although not explicitly of men), prescribing penalties of 15 to 25 years' imprisonment, or life imprisonment for cases of rape

involving armed abduction. Some rights groups argued the law lacked a comprehensive definition of rape and relegated some crimes to the lesser offense of indecent assault. The law criminalized domestic and intimate rape but did not explicitly criminalize spousal rape. Corrective rape was believed to be criminalized under the Penal Code but there were no known instances of prosecution. Civil society organizations reported instances of police pressuring rape and domestic violence survivors not to pursue charges. According to media reports in November citing statistics from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, eight million women and girls were subjected to some form of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse annually.

In August, the Court of Cassation upheld an eight-year prison sentence for Ahmed Bassam Zaki for sexually assaulting and blackmailing three young women. Some commentators described the “ABZ case” as a catalyst for the country’s #MeToo movement, as survivors of abuse registered at least 50 allegations against the former university student.

Domestic violence was a significant problem. The law did not specifically prohibit domestic violence or spousal abuse, but authorities could apply provisions relating to assault with accompanying penalties. The law required an assault survivor to produce multiple eyewitnesses, often difficult for domestic abuse survivors. Police often treated domestic violence as a matter for private family resolution and declined to pursue criminal charges. Canonical laws governing family matters among Coptic Christians did not recognize domestic violence as grounds for divorce.

A local rights organization reported 471 incidents of violence against women in the first half of the year, including 158 homicides and 239 domestic violence incidents.

The Ministry of Interior included a unit responsible for combating sexual and gender-based violence. The NCW was responsible for coordinating government and civil society efforts to empower women.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C was illegal but was a serious problem, since incidents were not consistently reported and the law was not always enforced. According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the most recent data showed a drop in the rate of FGM/C among girls and young women ages 0-19 from 21 percent to 14 percent between 2014 and 2021. The overall rate for women of all ages dropped from 92 percent to 86 percent.

According to international and local observers, the government took steps to enforce the FGM/C law, including maintaining hotlines to inform authorities of doctors who performed the operations. In February, the Ministry of Social Solidarity launched a public awareness campaign entitled “FGM is a crime” targeting areas where the practice was prevalent.

In January, the National Committee for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation announced it thwarted an attempt to commit the crime of female genital mutilation on a girl, age 11, in Cairo and reported blocking additional attempts of commit FGM/C in various governorates throughout the year.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: The law allowed leniency towards men who killed their wives upon discovering them in an act of adultery. The law did not specifically address “honor” crimes, which authorities treated as any other crime.

In September, according to local media reports, three women were killed in separate incidents in the span of a few days by colleagues or former partners, sparking a wave of outrage over the prevalence of gender-based violence. One women’s rights activist told media a woman’s refusal to comply with a man’s request could lead to her death.

The government took steps to prevent sexual harassment, including increasing prison terms and fines for those convicted and defining aggravated harassment categories for perpetrators using a weapon or in the workplace. Despite these efforts, sexual harassment was a serious problem. An April report by the UN Human Rights Committee registered concern that heightened sentences for sexual harassment had not reduced its prevalence, reporting rates regarding violence against women had not increased, and women who pursued complaints through the courts were often revictimized by intrusive and negative media attention, intimidation by defendants and the prosecution, and drawn-out investigations.

Discrimination: The constitution committed to “achieving equality between women and men in all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.” While the government took some steps to improve their situation, women did not enjoy the same legal rights and opportunities as men, and discrimination was widespread. Aspects of the law and traditional societal practices disadvantaged women in family, social, and economic life.

Women faced widespread societal discrimination, threats to their physical security, and workplace bias in favor of men, hindering their social and economic advancement.

Laws affecting marriage and personal status generally corresponded to an individual's religious group. A Muslim woman citizen could not legally marry a non-Muslim man. If she did, authorities could charge her with adultery and, under the government's interpretation of Islamic law, place any children from such a marriage in the custody of a male Muslim guardian. *Khula* (divorce) allowed a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided she gave up her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. The Coptic Orthodox Church permitted divorce only in rare circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion. Other Christian churches permitted divorce on a case-by-case basis.

The law followed sharia in matters of inheritance, meaning a Muslim woman generally received one-half the amount of a man's inheritance, and Christian widows of Muslim men had no inheritance rights. A sole Muslim woman heir received one-half her parents' estate, with the balance going to the siblings of the parents or the children of the siblings if the siblings were deceased. A sole man heir inherited his parents' entire estate.

In marriage and divorce cases, a woman usually had to convey her testimony through an adult man relative or representative for the court to admit it as credible. The law assumed a man's testimony was credible unless proven otherwise.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

President Sisi encouraged citizens to have smaller families. In September, he called for controlling childbirth in the country, citing the experience of the one-child policy in China. The government announced a 1,000 EGP (\$32) annual incentive to married women who restricted themselves to two children, paid in full after a woman turned 45 if they adhered to certain requirements. The government offered family planning methods for free or at lowered prices as part of initiatives to slow the rate of population growth.

Gender norms and social, cultural, economic, and religious barriers inhibited some women's ability to make reproductive decisions and to access contraceptives. Some women lacked access to information on reproductive health, and the limited availability of women health-care providers reduced access to skilled health attendance during pregnancy and childbirth, in view of the preference many women had for women health-care providers based on social and religious reasons.

There was limited information on government assistance to survivors of sexual assault, including whether emergency contraception was available as part of clinical management of rape.

SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

The constitution considered all citizens “equal in rights, freedoms, and general duties without discrimination based on religion, belief, gender, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation, or any other reason.” The main groups facing racial or ethnic violence and discrimination included Nubians and Bedouins, as well as refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants.

In May, the advocacy organization Minority Rights Group released a report on the status of Nubian, Sinai Bedouin, and Amazigh communities who indicated they often faced extreme marginalization. According to the report, marginalization of these groups resulted from many factors, including absence or stereotyping in the media and popular culture.

Local media outlets and advocacy organizations reported harassment, bullying, and racism towards refugees and migrants, particularly around times of crisis. Refugees and migrants described discrimination ranging from racist comments and jokes to lack of access to housing or employment and being blamed for increasing costs of living. Several organizations noted these incidents increased as the conflict in Sudan broke out and the number of arrivals to Egypt increased, with hashtags such as “Cancel entry visas for Sudanese” trending during the crisis.

CHILDREN

Birth Registration: The government attempted to register all births soon after delivery, but some citizens in remote and tribal areas such as the Sinai Peninsula registered births late or could not document their citizenship. In some cases, failure to register resulted in denial of public services, particularly in urban areas where most services required presentation of a national identification card.

Education: The law provided for compulsory, free, and universal education, including for stateless persons and refugees, until the ninth grade. Public schools enrolled Syrian, Yemeni, Sudanese, and South Sudanese refugees. Refugees of other nationalities often did not attend

public schools because of administrative barriers, discrimination, bullying, and preferences for English-language instruction or for different curricula.

Critics observed overcrowding in classrooms led to students' dependence on additional tutoring sessions, which were prohibitively expensive for those with limited economic resources, to score adequately on national exams.

Child Abuse: The constitution required the government to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, mistreatment, and commercial sexual exploitation. According to a local rights group, authorities recorded hundreds of cases of alleged child abuse each month but struggled to address the scope of the problem. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, which operated a telephone hotline, worked on child abuse matters, and several civil society organizations assisted runaway and abandoned children.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal age of marriage was 18. A government study published in 2020 reported 2.5 percent of the population in Upper Egypt were married between the ages of 15 and 17, with higher rates among girls than boys. Informal marriages unrecognized under the law could lead to contested paternity and leave women and girls without alimony or other benefits available to women with registered marriages.

Families reportedly sometimes forced adolescent girls to marry wealthy foreign men in what were known locally as "tourism" or "summer" marriages for the purpose of sexual exploitation, prostitution, or forced labor. The law required a foreign man wanting to marry a citizen woman more than 25 years younger to pay the woman EGP 50,000 (\$1,615). Women's rights organizations argued that allowing foreign men to pay a fine to marry much younger women represented a form of trafficking and encouragement of child or forced marriage.

The government oftentimes enforced the law. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood and governorate child protection units identified attempted child marriages. In August, a tip to the national helpline halted the marriage of a girl, age 15, from Fayoum, according to local media. The council referred the child's father and a local official to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution. Officials in the Giza Governorate reported responding to 312 potential cases through the national hotline, thwarting six child marriages through August.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law provided for sentences of not less than five years' imprisonment and fines for conviction of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child

pornography. The government did not adequately enforce the law. The minimum age for consensual sex was 18.

ANTISEMITISM

The country's Jewish community reportedly numbered as few as 10 individuals split between Cairo and Alexandria. Certain media outlets published antisemitic content from time to time.

In April, the IMPACT-se NGO issued a report detailing progress in removing antisemitic content from new textbooks for first grade through fifth grade. The review found textbooks for sixth grade through 12th grade remained problematic, however.

On October 8, one day after Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel, a police officer providing security for a tourist group in Alexandria shot and killed two Israeli tourists and their Egyptian guide. Multiple commentators observed a significant increase in antisemitic commentary in the traditional and social media during the Israeli military operations in Gaza.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE, CRIMINALIZATION, AND OTHER ABUSES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Criminalization: While the law did not explicitly criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity, authorities regularly arrested and prosecuted LGBTQI+ persons on charges including "debauchery," prostitution, and "violating family values," for which the law imposed sentences of up to 10 years in prison, significant fines, or both. Authorities also reportedly prosecuted LGBTQI+ individuals for "misuse of social media." This resulted in de facto criminalization of same-sex conduct and identity.

According to a local rights group, authorities charged more than 50 defendants in at least eight debauchery cases during the year. Rights groups and activists reported police harassment of LGBTQI+ persons, including physical assault, forcibly soliciting bribes to avoid arrest, and forcing them to provide information concerning other LGBTQI+ individuals. There were reports authorities used social media, dating websites, and mobile phone apps to entrap persons they suspected of being gay or transgender, prompting the dating platform Grindr to issue a warning to its users in the country to exercise caution when interacting with unknown parties. Rights groups reported authorities, including the Forensic Medical Authority, conducted forced anal examinations in all cases involving “debauchery” charges, which rights groups indicated primarily targeted LGBTQI+ individuals.

In December, prosecutors charged a man with “incitement to lure males with the intention to commit immoral acts” and “assaulting family principles and values” using an online dating account, according to a local NGO. The prosecutor declared the forensic medical department performed a “medical examination to reveal the presence of traces of engaging in deviant activities,” which rights groups observed was a euphemism for forced anal examinations that LGBTQI+ community members were frequently subjected to when arrested.

In January, the BBC broadcast a documentary examining the practices of security forces and criminal gangs working in tandem to arrest and exploit members of the LGBTQI+ community using social media and dating applications. In February, Human Rights Watch issued a report documenting 29 arrests and prosecutions in the country in recent years, including against foreigners, and concluded the arrests were the result of a coordinated policy – either directed or acquiesced to by senior government officials – of using digital methods to target LGBTQI+ individuals.

Violence and Harassment: Local rights groups and media reported several incidents of domestic and street violence or threats of violence against LGBTQI+ individuals, including extortion attempts by criminal gangs entrapping members of the community via photographs or videos and threatening to expose the victims to family members or employers.

In January, Salama Dawood, president of al-Azhar University, called on “the world’s wise people” to criminalize homosexuality and establish deterrent punishments for its practice, during a speech at a conference of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences in Kuwait. Salama noted “true sharia has made the punishment for sodomy death for both the actor and the object of it,” and that “it is puzzling that the world does not proceed according to what is required by rational minds and common sense.”

Discrimination: The law did not recognize LGBTQI+ couples, and authorities did not use antidiscrimination laws to protect LGBTQI+ individuals. There was widespread public support for discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community. In July, the Supreme Administrative Court issued a final ruling upholding the dismissal of an employee of the National Media Authority due to his perceived sexual orientation. There was no specific law against homosexuality, but the disciplinary court that issued the original judgement considered the employee's conduct, as depicted in an explicit video clip, as "a violation of civil service ethics."

Local contacts reported several cases of landlords or neighbors trying to force LGBTQI+ persons to vacate their homes by threatening to file police complaints against them. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination. LGBTQI+ persons rarely reported discrimination because they faced intimidation and the risk of arrest. The law gave officials the authority to deport LGBTQI+ foreigners or bar their entry to the country, and they infrequently did so.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: The Egyptian Medical Syndicate allowed for gender-affirming treatment including surgery, with approval by a special committee composed of medical doctors and al-Azhar clergy. The committee relied on a fatwa stipulating gender-affirming treatment had to be "medically necessary" and justified by a "biological," not a "mental," matter. Thus, according to rights groups, the surgery was allowed only for intersex persons and the process existed more on paper than in practice, leaving transgender individuals to seek treatment from unregulated and often unsafe clinics. Activists contended the committee existed only for "propaganda purposes," approved very few surgeries, and required those wanting treatment to undergo years of psychological monitoring. Medical providers who performed gender-affirming surgery without the committee's approval were subject to criminal prosecution. Barring meeting these conditions, individuals could not change their identity documents to match the gender with which they identified.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: So-called conversion therapy was available and widely publicized by well-known therapists and religious leaders in both the Christian and Muslim communities. These programs often marketed themselves to family members of LGBTQI+ individuals; activists reported occasional involuntary enrollments in conversion programs. There was no information available on whether medically unnecessary and irreversible "normalization" surgeries were performed on children or on nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: Legal discrimination and social stigma impeded LGBTQI+ persons from organizing or advocating

publicly in defense of their rights. State-controlled media did not allow the expression of opinions supporting LGBTQI+ rights. Talk show hosts frequently discussed such rights in homophobic terms and described them as an imposition of Western values on other cultures. LGBTQI+ civil society organizations could not register officially, and the LGBTQI+ community and its supporters faced severe limits on their ability to advocate for their rights due to the government's general restriction on peaceful assembly and failure to provide the community any protection against violence or harassment.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The constitution stated persons with disabilities were equal before the law. Discrimination based on disability in education, employment, health, political activity, rehabilitation, training, and legal protection was against the law. The 2018 law on persons with disabilities stipulated that newly built housing had to be accessible and appropriate means of mass transit made available at a reduced rate. The government provided information regarding disability rights through awareness-raising campaigns. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities did not have access on an equal basis with others to education, health services, public buildings, and transportation. Government-owned mass transit was generally not accessible.

The law stipulated a prison sentence of no less than two years, a fine, or both, for bullying persons with disabilities, with prison terms and fines doubled for repeat offenders; the government enforced the law. In March, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) responded to a complaint of assault and bullying towards individuals with physical disabilities. The perpetrator was convicted, sentenced to two years in prison, and fined 110,000 EGP (\$3,550). Bullying of persons with disabilities also happened online. The head of the NCPD, Iman Karim, indicated to local media the stiffening of penalties for bullying persons with disabilities was a mandate to deal firmly with such offenses.

The law provided for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment. Government policy set a quota for employing 5 percent of workers with disabilities for companies with more than 50 employees. Authorities did not enforce the quota requirement, and some companies had persons with disabilities on their payroll without employing them to meet the quota. Government-operated treatment centers for persons with disabilities, especially children, were of poor quality.

Persons with disabilities often could not exercise the right to vote because not all polling stations were accessible. Ahead of the December presidential elections, the National Election

Authority worked with the Ministry of Social Solidarity to direct persons with disabilities to accessible polling stations. The NCPD also held a training session for elections officials in September to prepare to implement accessibility features and improve access to polling stations for persons with disabilities. Local and international observers reported significant efforts to facilitate voting during the elections, including the presence of wheelchairs at polling stations, ballots printed in Braille, and other accommodations on a case-by-case basis.

Women and girls with disabilities faced a higher risk of violence, abuse, and neglect compared to those without disabilities. Sixty-one percent of women with disabilities surveyed had experienced violence by their husband and family, and 51 percent had faced psychological trauma before marriage.

Some children with disabilities attended schools with their peers who did not have disabilities, while others attended segregated schools. Some of the segregated institutions were informal schools run by NGOs. Some parents of children with disabilities complained on social media of teacher assistants' lack of experience.

OTHER SOCIETAL VIOLENCE OR DISCRIMINATION

Individuals with HIV faced significant social stigma and discrimination in society and the workplace. The health-care system provided and promoted anonymous counseling and testing for HIV, free adult and pediatric antiretroviral therapy, and support groups.

Section 7.

Worker Rights

A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The constitution provided for freedom of association and the right to “peaceful” strikes. The law provided for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions and bargain collectively but imposed significant restrictions, including prior approval by a general trade union affiliated with the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (Union Federation). The government did not effectively enforce applicable laws, including prohibitions on antiunion discrimination. Penalties for violations of the freedom of association and the right to strike were less than those under other laws involving denials of civil rights. Penalties were rarely applied against violators of freedom of association and the right to strike. The law prescribed union elections every four years and imposed a strict hierarchy for union formation consisting of a company-

level trade union committee, a profession or industry-level general union, and a national-level union.

The law required centralized tripartite negotiations that included workers, represented by a union affiliated with the Union Federation, business owners, and the Ministry of Labor (formerly Ministry of Manpower), which oversaw and monitored negotiations and agreements. The government seldom participated in tripartite negotiations, leaving workers to negotiate directly with employers, frequently after resorting to a strike.

Most violations of workers' rights, including delayed payment of salaries, arbitrary dismissal, suspension, and seeking criminal charges against striking workers, took place in the private sector, with the government's knowledge, according to the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services.

The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and provided for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity, but the prohibition was rarely enforced.

The Ministry of Labor did not allow trade unions to adopt their own bylaws in addition to those provided in the law. Local workers' rights organizations complained this was contrary to the law, which stated unions could use the statutory bylaws as guidance to develop their own.

The government occasionally arrested workers who staged strikes or criticized the government, and it rarely reversed arbitrary dismissals. On February 14, workers at a home appliance manufacturer initiated a strike for increased wages, leading to the arrest of 18 workers on charges of inciting a strike and disruption of work. Workers and management reached a new agreement on February 16, after which police released the workers.

Previously established independent unions faced pressure to dissolve, and new unions faced impediments to completing establishment requirements. In many cases, the Ministry of Labor delayed responding to unions' applications for legal status, according to statements to media. In September, a local labor rights group issued a report documenting how delayed government responses to independent unions' registration applications effectively blocked the establishment of at least 18 organizations. In other instances, the Ministry of Labor refused to legalize proposed unions if a state-controlled Union Federation-affiliated counterpart existed.

The law required workers to obtain permits before staging sit-ins on public or private property, and authorities could prosecute those who failed to do so. Unauthorized sit-ins

nonetheless often occurred when authorities did not approve the required permits.

B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

C. PROHIBITION OF CHILD LABOR AND MINIMUM AGE FOR EMPLOYMENT

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings> .

D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)

E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK

Wage and Hour Laws: By law the government set a monthly minimum wage for government employees and public-sector workers, which was above the poverty line. The law also gave the National Wages Council, headed by the minister of planning and economic development, the authority to set the minimum wage for private-sector workers, which was above the poverty line. The law stipulated a maximum 48-hour workweek for the public and private sectors and provided for premium pay for overtime and work on rest days and national holidays. The law prohibited excessive compulsory overtime. The law did not ensure equal pay for equal work. Labor rights activists told local media the lack of oversight and enforcement of the regulations allowed many employers to ignore the requirements, particularly in the service and informal sectors.

The law excluded agricultural, fisheries, and domestic workers from wage and hour regulations.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were not always sufficient for the main industries, including agriculture, manufacturing, quarrying, mining, and services. The law allowed workers to remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to employment, but authorities did not reliably enforce this right. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations lay with occupational safety and health experts and the employer, not the worker.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The National Center for Occupational Safety and Health Studies and Securing the Work Environment, chaired by the Ministry of Labor, was responsible for enforcing labor laws and standards for working conditions. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties for OSH violations, which were sometimes enforced with fines and imprisonment, were commensurate with other laws, such as negligence. Labor inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The number of labor inspectors, however, was insufficient to enforce compliance.

Some private-sector employers reportedly required workers to sign undated resignation letters as a condition of employment, which the employers could use to terminate employees at will, in contravention of the law.

The Ministry of Labor did not enforce labor standards in the informal sector, which employed approximately 40 percent of workers.

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