



STRIKING BACK

EGYPT'S ATTACK ON
LABOUR RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Cover Photo: Mai Shaheen

Thousands of workers at Egypt's biggest textile company strike for minimum wage, payment of delayed bonuses, and a change in company leadership, Mahalla, February 2014.

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*"The government message right now is that striking does not get you rights,
it gets you fired and on military trial."*

- WHRD and labour leader

"Workers are offered freedom for resigning from their jobs.

But whether you're in prison or free without a job, either way, your family has no money for food."

- Labour rights defender

Executive Summary

Labour rights defenders in Egypt are facing more risks than they have in decades, according to interviews with human rights defenders (HRDs) conducted by Front Line Defenders.

As increasing numbers of working class Egyptians descend into poverty in a struggling economy, labour rights activism demanding safe working conditions, a minimum wage and freedom of assembly is critical. However, the regime of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has punished labour rights defenders with arrests, disappearances, beatings in detention, intimidation by State Security, mass firings, withholding of salaries and benefits and trials in military courts. Several activists who have participated in factory strikes since the 1960s told Front Line Defenders that in their lifetimes, they have never faced this level of violence and retribution against labour rights activism.

As the Ministry of Defense purchases more land, factories, hospitals, hotels, and public institutions, labour rights defenders occupy a particularly dangerous place in Egypt's increasingly militarized economy. Organizing in any company or sector owned or operated by the military puts HRDs at increased and direct risk of military prosecution. The number of civilians sent to military trials has soared to more than 15,000 since Sisi came to power in a military coup in 2013. State security agents routinely visit the offices of labour rights lawyers, many of whom have been detained and put on trial. HRDs documenting violations of economic and social rights in poor Egyptian communities report significantly decreasing their work for fear of military prosecution.

In 2017, a new trade union law criminalized striking in "strategic sectors" and made the establishment of vaguely defined "political" trade unions – understood to mean independent trade unions not aligned with the government – punishable by up to 15 years in prison¹. HRDs have been physically assaulted for trying to enter state-aligned trade union meetings, and are often punished for workplace activism by being relocated to factories hours away from their homes. Mass firings in retaliation for strikes and peaceful sit-ins have occurred in at least 14 companies since 2016, and HRDs working in textile factories, public transportation, healthcare and construction have been singled-out and fired for organizing peaceful actions. Authorities routinely disappear, arrest and torture HRDs (reports include electric shocks, beatings, sexual assault and severing body parts), while security forces enjoy near-absolute impunity for these abuses. In 2016, Italian doctoral student Giulio Regeni, who was researching trade unions, was abducted, tortured, and later found dead

on the side of the road outside Cairo, his body smeared with blood.

Now one of the most dangerous topics in the country, labour rights was for decades Egypt's most powerful social mobiliser. Strikes in the 1990s and early 2000s brought thousands of Egyptians to the streets. Since the 1950s, sit-ins have demanded a minimum wage, affordable education for working class children, safer working conditions following gruesome deaths on factory floors due to company neglect, and the right to organize independent unions. Under previous regimes, worker movements succeeded in reversing harmful economic measures and achieving better living conditions, despite arrests, violent crackdowns, and opposition from the state-aligned Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF). Former President Hosni Mubarak was toppled in a revolution underpinned by mass protests in working class communities.

Strong workers' rights-focused actions continued well into the Sisi years, even as many social movements were silenced by the increasingly authoritarian regime. Since the last major factory strike in Mahalla in early 2017, however, HRDs report that militarized and violent threats are preventing even economic protests from breaking out.

Under the current regime, the government has sought and secured a number of new arms deals with European countries and companies, and reignited the trade and migration-focused "Partnership Priorities" with the European Union. The majority state-owned French company Naval Group is engaged in arms deals worth more than €3 billion with Egypt, including at a military-owned and -operated Alexandria factory where 26 civilian workers and HRDs have been detained and put on military trial for "inciting a strike." This reports focuses on the Alexandria Shipyard factory as a case study emblematic of how the military violently suppresses labour rights activism.

Labour rights defenders across Egypt are working at the dangerous intersection of an increasingly militarized economy and skyrocketing numbers of military trials for civilians. European companies operating in Egypt and holding contracts with the Egyptian Ministry of Defense or corporate partners must insist on labour standards and the rights of defenders to organize free from persecution, or risk being complicit in the repression.

1. In December 2017, Sisi issued Law no. 213/2017 expanding state domination of trade unions and targeting those established following the 2011 uprising. The law directly contradicts Article 767 of the 2014 Constitution which guarantees the right of workers to establish syndicates and unions.

Key Findings

- Labour rights defenders in factories, hospitals, oil companies and transportation centres have been arrested, interrogated, and charged with criminal offences related to their peaceful activism. Accusations include instigating a strike, halting or obstructing production, and membership of a banned group – widely understood to be the Muslim Brotherhood.
- HRDs working in public transportation, textile manufacturing, grain mills, cement factories, and nursing have been fired for peaceful rights work. Authorities and company management target HRDs known for documenting violations, educating colleagues about labour laws and leading strikes.
- Collective punishment via mass firing or suspension is increasingly common under Sisi's regime. This erodes solidarity between HRDs and their communities, who fear being pushed further into poverty for supporting HRD-led movements. In the Alexandria Shipyard case, more than 2000 workers were physically prevented from going to their factory jobs following a sit-in in May 2016; approximately 900 still do not have their jobs back more than two years later.
- The military's increasing influence over the economy has undermined workers' movements and the security of labour rights defenders. In 2014, the military responded to a strike by Cairo's public transport workers by providing 500 buses and drivers to keep the transportation system running.
- Increasing numbers of HRDs are being targeted with military prosecution. As the military acquires more factories, farms, hospitals, and service sector business staffed by civilians, the threat of military prosecution to labour rights defenders continues to rise.
- The majority of HRDs Front Line Defenders spoke to report drastically reduced abilities to interview employees of factories, hospitals, schools, and public transportation centres due to the risk of arrest and military prosecution.
- Sexism and a variety of gendered attacks are deployed within and against labour rights movements in order to limit the powerful work of women human rights defenders (WHRDs). WHRDs in the nursing, teaching, and textile sectors reported being pushed out of leadership roles in organisations they helped to found.
- Several WHRDs report receiving pressure from male colleagues to stop their activism following threats by military and civilian prosecutors that only the men would be imprisoned.
- WHRDs' fathers receive threatening, sexist phone calls from State Security demanding that they "control" their daughters' activism.
- Most working class labour rights defenders lack adequate legal representation, hindered by both class and economic barriers. Lawyers in Cairo, Alexandria, and Mahalla have been threatened with arrest and disappearance by state intelligence officers. Intimidation increases when they are working on labour trials in military or State Security courts.
- Companies punish outspoken HRDs by weaponizing poverty: tactics include relocating them to remote factories far from their home towns and threatening detainees to resign from their jobs.
- HRDs running for labour union leadership have had their names removed from ballots, while others are unable to enter the election race at all due to the economic and class barriers to registering.

Key Recommendations

For the Egyptian government:

- Immediately drop all charges against labour rights defenders, trade unionists and workers in all sectors who have been targetted as a result of their peaceful activism, organising, and leadership in the struggle for labour rights;
- Cease targetting trade unionists and labour rights defenders including women labour rights defenders in all circumstances, so that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals, torture, imprisonment, and judicial harassment;
- Create an enabling environment for free and independent trade unions by revoking Law no. 213 of 2017, which contradicts Article 676 of the 2014 Constitution guaranteeing the right of workers to establish syndicates and unions;
- Respect the right of workers to strike, including workers in companies and work sites owned or operated by the Ministry of Defense, and ensure the implementation of the legal obligations enshrined in the core ILO conventions, notably 87 and 98, by reforming all provisions in the Penal Code and Labour Law which restrict the right to strike;
- Amend Law no. 107 of 2013 to end arbitrary and unnecessary restriction on the Right to Public Meetings, Processions and Peaceful Demonstrations and revoke Law no. 10 of 1914 which criminalises and imposes harsh penalties on assemblies of five or more people if authorities consider the gathering a threat to public peace;

For the French government:

- Mainstream the protection of human rights defenders, including labour rights defenders in the bilateral economic, security and military cooperation between France and Egypt, fully adopting and implementing the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders;
- In coordination with EU Member States, and in consultation with HRDs, ensure French embassy staff are available to observe trials of HRDs, including trials in military and state security courts, and particularly those of labour rights defenders connected to projects with French companies, and issue public statements regarding whether or not the trials meet international standards;
- Investigate majority-French state owned company Naval Group's adherence to its obligations under the French Duty of Vigilance Law to identify and prevent human rights violations by its staff, partners and contractors in Alexandria;
- Conduct a full review of all French companies operating in Egypt or maintaining contracts with Egyptian companies to ensure compliance with French and EU legal provisions for labourers and labour conditions;

Key Recommendations

For Naval Group:

- Immediately insist that its partner, the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, halt the ongoing military trial of workers and labour rights defenders who are charged for their work defending labour rights in projects supervised by Naval Group's staff and contractors in Alexandria;
- Publicly state that there will be a re-evaluation of the relationship between Naval Group and the Egyptian Ministry of Defense if the military trial and targeting of HRDs continue;
- Conduct a thorough and transparent internal investigation into the abuses committed against Egyptian labour rights defenders and workers in projects contracted by Naval Group and its partners in Alexandria, including determination if Naval Group staff or contractors in Egypt were not complicit in human rights abuses, and publicise the findings of this investigation;

For the European Union and Member States:

- Condition EU budget support, other forms of aid and political dialogue to the elimination of military trials of civilians and of torture;
- Adopt due diligence requirements for investors within the framework of the EU's upcoming Sustainable Finance Package, as well as disclosure and reporting requirements for investors for ESG and human rights impact assessments;
- Ensure that the EU's financial support to Egyptian government under the Revised European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is not provided to public or private corporations which repress workers or labour rights defenders, by establishing a formal reporting and review mechanism;
- Fully implement the EU HRD Guidelines, in consultation with HRDs, including: ask the authorities to have access to and visit labour rights defenders who currently face the military trial; monitor and observe their trials and denounce the absence of due process and the abusive use of anti terrorism and security legislation to silence defenders; engage in dialogue with the Egyptian authorities and with Naval Group to mediate a solution that is fully human rights compliant;
- Regularly release public statements on cases of labour rights defenders, raising in particular the cases of women labour rights defenders and those from marginalised communities.

Methodology

Front Line Defenders conducted more than two dozen interviews with human rights defenders from Cairo, Alexandria, Mahalla, and Aswan – key sites of labour protests and union organizing. The majority of HRDs interviewed are labourers themselves, working in textile factories, public transportation, healthcare and construction. Researchers also spoke with lawyers, journalists, economic and social rights researchers, and several HRDs documenting and resisting military trials

for civilians, a key issue intersecting with labour rights. Several names in the report have been changed to protect their identities.

Front Line Defenders is grateful for the guidance, collaboration, and peer reviews provided by Egyptian human rights defenders and feminists.

A Note on Gender, Labour, and Women Human Rights Defenders

Any current or future documentations of violations against labour rights defenders in Egypt – including this report – must acknowledge that the documented history of the labour movement in Egypt has, as with most written histories, often failed to name and validate the efforts and massive burdens shouldered by WHRDs, female unionists, factory workers, and working mothers.

Many books, films, and articles documenting the history of the Egyptian labour movement acknowledge the high percentage of women present in several key strikes in Egyptian history (such as those in the early 2000s in Mahalla El-Kubra), but very few include testimonies from or details about the individual WHRDs or small groups of women activists responsible for organizing those movements. The published history of the labour movement seldom names or quotes women, such that today most of the activists who are sought for their generational analysis – because they were quoted in reports between 1960 and 1990 – are men. Front Line Defenders is grateful for both the current testimonies and the historical analyses provided by WHRDs interviewed for this report, as well as the contextual framing offered by several Egyptian feminists.

This report aims, in part, to visibilize the central role of women in organising, creating, and defending labour movements in Egypt, and to highlight the specific threats endured by WHRDs who challenge the intersecting systems of patriarchy, militarism, authoritarianism and poverty.

I. Egyptian Labour: Resistance & Repression

In 1938, activists organized the first recorded labour strike at Gazl el-Mahalla, then the largest factory in the Middle East. Workers successfully protested against a changeover in shift structure that reduced take home pay.²

A decade later, another popular strike demanded that labour rights defenders who had been fired for advocating for salary increases get their jobs back. The British colonial regime sent tanks to quell the protests in support of the HRDs – three strikers were killed. Over the next 60 years, waves of strikes and protests in Mahalla would see tens of thousands of workers demonstrate, usually peacefully and often successfully, against dangerous working conditions, desperately low salaries, withheld education benefits for their children, privatization, and austerity measures imposed via deals with the IMF, World Bank, and debt relief from Western and Gulf states. During this entire period, Egypt was ruled by authoritarian governments under which there were no guarantees of freedom of assembly or association.

"Every Egyptian regime builds on the repression tactics of the last. Sisi is a monster for labour activists because he sees the movement's successes under Mubarak as Mubarak's key downfall.

Our strikes began to succeed in the late 2000s, one after another after another, the people learned the power of protest. Within a decade, Mubarak fell. Of course Sisi thinks workers are his number one enemy."

- Labour rights defender, Cairo



Real estate tax collectors' strike, 2007. Photo: Hossam el-Hamalawy

2. Beinín, Joel. Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954. Pg 277-278.

Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF)

Every Egyptian regime since Gamal Abdel Nasser has violated workers' right to form independent unions, and has used the state-aligned Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) to suppress worker demands. The ETUF was founded in 1957 under Nasser as the official state-controlled labour federation. The 1976 Trade Union Law did not recognize any trade unions outside of the ETUF, whose constitution and election procedures were dictated directly by the Ministry of Manpower and Migration.

For decades, the ETUF actively defended the government's repression of working communities and stood directly against the vast majority of workers' public actions. In 1967, when workers protested wage austerity after the Arab-Israeli War, the ETUF backed the government's position. In 1977, when IMF-imposed subsidies increased food prices by up to fifty percent, the ETUF did not participate in or support the massive worker protests in response, which were nonetheless successful – the government rescinded the price increases. In the early 1990s, Egypt agreed to implement privatization reforms in exchange for debt relief from Western and Gulf states, signed additional deals with

the IMF and World Bank, and enacted a law that began the privatizations of more than 300 public companies. The ETUF president voted in favour of the law, going so far as to claim that Egyptian workers supported the privatization program – in flagrant opposition to the tens of thousands protesting against it. In his book *Workers and Thieves: Labour Movements and Popular Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt*, social historian Joel Beinin states that though the ETUF was technically opposed to privatization, the ETUF opposed all but two labour rights strikes during the entire Mubarak era, during which time workers rose up thousands of times against painful economic conditions.³

Through the ETUF, the state repeatedly intervened in the elections of trade union committees and general trade unions by excluding independent or critical candidates. ETUF representatives in various public sectors are rarely available or known to workers, and those who are frequently report to State Security any HRDs who attempt to organize independent worker movements.



Testimony: Fatima, Nurse, Cairo

Fatima, a nurse and WHRD in Cairo, began documenting and publicizing violations against hospital workers in 2010. When she began writing and distributing labour rights articles to her colleagues, nurses affiliated with the ETUF reported her to national security. Agents then began coming to the hospital during her shift hours to intimidate her and her colleagues.

“Even the nurses who reported me have the same issues with salaries and working hours – their rights are violated as much as anyone else. They are just scared of the state and haven't been told about their rights, laws, or even what they are owed from their union. This is part of how the union works with the government to oppress us. There is supposed to be a union representative [from the national nurses union affiliated with the ETUF] in each hospital, but we rarely know who they are. They don't know our salaries or the relevant laws, and they never advocate on our behalf.”



3. Beinin, Joel. *Workers and Thieves: Labour Movements and Popular Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.*”

Since its founding, the ETUF has actively worked to defame and delegitimize HRDs who advocate for labour rights outside its restrictive framework. State-aligned syndicates in a variety of industries routinely enter shop floors, hospitals, and schools to spread rumours about the motives or inadequacies of independent unionists and HRDs, while state media increasingly portrays all HRDs as national security threats or “Islamists.”

The ETUF is also closely linked to Government Ministries such as Manpower and Education. HRDs who work for the rights of teachers, for example, report that the Ministry of Education will theoretically receive the demands of an independent union but pass them directly on to the official syndicate aligned with ETUF.

“After receiving our demands back from the Ministry, the state-controlled teachers syndicate issues vague announcements that it plans to put forth demands even greater than ours. They want to give impression that the state union can better advocate for teachers than independent labour activists. But for decades, we received nothing from the ETUF state-aligned syndicate.”
- WHRD, Teacher, Cairo

“The ETUF sends people onto the shop floor to tell workers we weren’t qualified to represent them, that we were paid by political parties to work against them. Of course, in reality, the ETUF was never fighting for workers. I’ve been organizing for more than two decades and not once has the ETUF supported a single one of our strikes.”
- HRD, Factory, Mahalla

Mubarak Years

During Hosni Mubarak’s 30 year rule, HRDs, labour leaders, and workers who “instigated” strikes and protests were often punished by being relocated to factories in other governorates, hours from their homes and families. The cost of transport to and from the factory was often borne by the worker, such that families descended into poverty as punishment for the activism of a parent. Mass firings and arrests were highly uncommon, however, and rarely permanent, as they have become under Sisi.

A wave of protests in the early 2000s saw Egyptian workers engage in nearly 4,000 public demonstrations, strikes, or actions on factory floors. A range of factors contributed to the swell in labour activism, including privatization and corruption, oil and food prices, decrease in real wages, reduction in paid wages, inflation, and the industrial sector downsizing. In 2008, major riots broke out across Mahalla El-Kubra, home of the economically critical Masr Spinning and Weaving

Company, in which workers and their families marched down the street with a coffin and burning photos of the dictator – the first time in Egyptian history a burning photo of Mubarak was caught on film. The movement was further galvanized when labour rights activist and South Cairo Grain mill worker Nagi Rashad, represented by lawyer Khaled Ali, successfully sued the government over its decision not to increase the national minimum wage. In 2010, Rashad won; an administrative court ordered the prime minister, president and the National Council for Wages to adjust the minimum wage to the current cost of living.

Strikes and protests in a wide range of labour sectors swept Egypt in the run-up to the 2011 revolution. A number of labour leaders report that the regime often tried to “co-opt” them into the ruling party when intimidation and threats failed to quiet their activism.

*“Security routinely came to my work when I wasn’t there to warn my colleagues to stay away from me. Officers called my father and told him to ‘control’ his daughter. When none of this worked – and around the time workers from other cities started seeking my support to build their own protest and strike movements – security actually tried to co-opt me to join Mubarak’s official national party in 2010. **I asked if I would be allowed to criticize the NDP’s labour policies and national union. They said no, of course. So I refused – everyone was shocked. Very few people from our class are invited to join the party. But I’d rather be able to speak my mind.”***

- WHRD, Cairo

Post-Revolution

After the fall of Mubarak in 2011, the new government offered no concessions with regard to laws, institutions, freedom of association, minimum wage, or the right to strike. The interim government attempted to portray newly organised independent unions and vocal labour rights defenders as unable to properly represent Egyptian workers. To the contrary, renowned labour rights defender Kamal Abbas stated that nearly thirty new independent unions emerged in first year after Mubarak's fall, with several successfully lobbying for workers' rights: "some have already been able to win wage concessions through shop-floor actions and direct negotiations with government officials. Meanwhile, the state-controlled union's main campaign is to quash its new competition."⁴ The SCAF (Supreme Council of Armed Forces) regime enacted a law criminalizing strikes under any current or future period of emergency law. The law also maintained the legal framework that effectively banned strikes unless the ETUF granted permission. Such approval remained as unlikely as ever, and the ETUF continued to function as an extension of the state.

A number of direct assaults on worker movements occurred under SCAF rule in 2011:

- in April, female workers at the Turkish-owned Mega-Textile company in Sadat City (where tens of thousands work) were assaulted by management while protesting against desperately low monthly wages (LE450 Egyptian pounds; \$75 US; barely two-third of the minimum wage) and the lack of long-term contracts;
- in June, the army fired live ammunition into the air while repressing a strike after the Suez Canal Authority refused to implement a pledge to raise wages by 40 percent;
- also in June, two members of the independent teachers' union, WHRDs Hamala Korany and Atef Al-Gazar, were arrested during a protest demanding permanent jobs and faced a jail sentence of one year. Charges were eventually dropped.

In the twelve-month tenure of former president Mohamed Morsi, HRDs reported that trade union organising expanded greatly despite the new government's continued desire to preserve state-control

over the official federation. The government stalled on passing the law related to trade union freedoms, and in November 2012, Morsi issued a presidential decree amending the 1976 Trade Union Law. The decree allowed the government to remove all ETUF executive board members over the age of 60 and replace them with candidates – all aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood government – chosen by the Ministry of Manpower. Despite the Morsi government's clear efforts to maintain control of the ETUF, nearly 2,000 worker demonstrations in 2012 "more than tripled the pre-2011 highs of 614 in 2007 and 609 and 2008."⁵ A report from HRDs at ECESR documented a further 1,972 labour actions in the first 6 months of 2013 – bringing the total number of worker demonstrations under Morsi to nearly 4,000.⁶ By the end of Morsi's rule, three major independent trade union federations existed in Egypt: the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers, and the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC); these existed alongside major civil society and HRD-led rights groups, including ECESR and CTUWS, which consistently supported the movement with documentation, legal aid, advocacy and physical meeting space.



Real estate tax collectors' strike, 2007. Photo: Hossam el-Hamalawy

4. Egypt's Labour Pains: For Workers, the Revolution Has Just Begun. Ari Paul. 2011. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/egypts-labour-pains-for-workers-the-revolution-has-just-begun>
 5. Beinlin, Joel. "Workers and Thieves: Labour Movements and Popular Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt." Page 117.
 6. Taqir al-Ihtijajat al-Sanawi. ECESR, 2014.

II. Militarism & Poverty Under Sisi

The rule of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has been marked by an unprecedented crackdown on human rights defenders, rising military-led authoritarianism, and violent repression of freedom of assembly and association, including labour demonstrations, factory sit-ins, union gatherings, and HRD-led workshops on workers' rights.

Authorities routinely disappear, arrest, and torture HRDs with tactics including electric shocks, beatings, rape, and severing body parts. Security forces have been granted the freedom to arrest or disappear labour and trade union leaders at will, for "crimes" including alleged strike organising, documenting violations on the shop floor, and standing in peaceful solidarity with detained, fired, or injured colleagues. Security forces enjoy near-absolute impunity for these abuses.

The government re-established a state of emergency in April 2017 (extended multiple times, most recently in October 2018) following which it detained and placed hundreds of people on terrorism lists. Others had their assets seized for alleged terrorism links without due process. Rising government rhetoric about national unity and economic security has led to the widespread media portrayal of labour actions as "treasonous."

Militarization

In 2014, Sisi's government approved a five-year extension of a 2014 law that vastly extended grounds for trying civilians in military courts. HRDs report that since he came to power, more than 15,000 civilians, including HRDs, journalists, photographers, and children, have been sent to military trials. Ahead of the 2018 presidential election, despite having intimidated, threatened, or arrested every legitimate opponent, the regime embarked on an aggressive campaign against journalists and activists deemed critical of government. Arrests and disappearances skyrocketed. While HRDs working on wide range of issues were targetted, those seen to be critical of the government's ability to run a modern, economically viable state seemed particularly at risk – in early March, for example, a journalist reporting for a small local outlet in Alexandria was arrested for covering a defunct railway.

The increasing militarization of the Egyptian justice system and political sphere has been mirrored by a radical spike in the military's control of Egypt's real estate, manufacturing industries, agriculture, and transportation sector. While the military has wielded great economic power in Egypt since the 1970s, the scope and size of its assets has greatly expanded under Sisi. Since 2015, a new law allows the military to set up companies using foreign or domestic capital.⁷ The military has since announced a series of projects it either financed itself or by securing a government contract, which include building new resorts, producing cement, establishing fish farms, distributing hospital supplies, and manufacturing water meters. In 2016, Sisi issued a decree for the Armed Forces Land

Projects Agency to construct two new cities on more than 15,000 acres of military-controlled land, adding to a long list of military-run mega-projects including extension of the Suez Canal.

The military's increasing influence over the economy has undermined workers' movements and the security of labour rights defenders. In 2014, the military responded to a strike by Cairo's public transport workers by providing 500 buses and drivers to keep the transportation system running.

At the same time, increasing numbers of HRDs are being targetted with military prosecution for organising labour movements in military controlled sectors and spaces. As the military acquires more and more factories, farms, hospitals, and service sector business staffed by civilians, the threat of military prosecution to labour rights defenders will continue to rise.

7. The Return of Egypt's Military Interest Groups. 21 December 2015. <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/62337?lang=en>

Poverty & Labour

Egypt's economy has yet to recover from the precipitous drop in tourism and foreign investment following years of political instability and violent crackdowns on peaceful dissent. While crushing public space for dissent, the Sisi regime has also embarked on a campaign of austerity measures leaving the working class struggling to afford even basic food items. The value of the Egyptian pound depreciated by two-thirds in less than a year, which helps explain the ongoing labour protests through early 2017 even as the rest of Egyptian civil society largely quieted their activism to survive the crackdown. Half a century ago, Nasser's Egypt was in part defined by forging a relationship with the working class based on a trade-off: economic privileges and stability in exchange for restrictions on political rights and freedoms. Sit-ins, demonstrations, and industrial action of almost any kind were banned, but the government improved job security, wages, and provided other social and economic benefits. Strikes were banned, but people were seldom standing in bread lines. In its treatment of the labour rights movement and HRDs leading it, Sisi's regime seems to want to reintroduce the workers

half of this bargain – nullify independent trade unions in favour of the ETUF and put huge restrictions on industrial action – without holding up its half, so as to reduce government support for the working class and liberalize the economy at the expense of workers. For labour rights defenders, this means their activism is increasingly critical but facing extreme and heightened resistance.

In a strictly political view, the labour rights movement is but one of many civil society sectors which has been violently oppressed by Egypt's rising military authoritarianism. Any sign of dissent can lead swiftly to prosecution in a military or State Security court. When viewed in light of the state's economic policies, however, it is clear that the Sisi regime is especially concerned with attacking independent labour rights defenders because they challenge at once the political and financial paths the government is pursuing, while occupying a critical physical and economic space in a struggling state.



Women workers chant against the head of their company during a 2014 strike.
Photo: Mai Shaheen

III. Restrictive Legislation

Egyptian laws contain very severe restrictions on the peaceful activities of labour rights defenders and trade unions. Sisi's regime has expanded the criminalisation of labour rights documentation, organising, solidarity and activism.

a. Military Trials

Under Article 204 of the 2014 Constitution, civilians can be tried before military courts if they commit offences against military personnel, equipment, factories, funds, secrets or documents. The increasing involvement of the military in the business and services sectors has expanded the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians. Moreover, in October 2014, Sisi issued Decree Law no. 136 of 2014 for the Securing and Protection of Public and Vital Facilities which placed crimes committed on public property under the jurisdiction of military courts for two years.⁸ In August 2016, Law no. 65 of 2016 extended the application of this law for five years.

b. 2017 Trade Union Law

From 1976 to December 2017, Law no. 35 of 1976 denied workers the right to form independent trade unions and permitted only the ETUF, dominated by pro-government leaders, to represent workers. In March 2011, Minister of Manpower Ahmed Al-Borei issued a provisional executive order providing for the establishment of independent unions, and proposed a new draft law granting workers the right to organise. This draft law was sidelined by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF). In December 2017, Sisi issued Law no. 213 of 2017 expanding state domination of trade unions and targetting those established following the 2011 uprising. The law directly contradicts Article 767 of the 2014 Constitution which guarantees the right of workers to establish their syndicates and unions.

Under the law:

- Trade unions cannot be established on partisan, religious, sectarian or political basis and any violation of this provision is punishable by up to 15 years imprisonment (Article 5). This article restricts trade unions, their members and leaders in expressing views on political developments or engaging in human rights advocacy. HRDs further argue that "political" could be interpreted to include any union not aligned with the government.
- A membership threshold prohibits the establishment of trade unions, and eliminates the existing organisations, with fewer than 150 members (Article 11). This requirement excludes millions of workers in small, private sector companies across Egypt who cannot meet this threshold.
- Only one trade union committee is permitted in each company; anyone working in a company where the ETUF has a presence is not permitted to form a non-aligned union.
- For a general trade union to be established, it must include at least 15 trade union committees of at least 20,000 workers and the establishment of national trade union federations requires at least the membership of 10 general syndicates of at least 2000 members (Article 12).
- All independent trade unions which were established over the past decade will be dissolved under the Law, which requires all trade unions in Egypt to register again under new criteria. However, the Law maintains the legal personality of the pro-government trade unions established under Law no.35 of 1976.
- The Minister of Manpower has the power to form the committees which will be entrusted with supervising the elections, calling into doubt the potential for fair, open elections and campaigns (Article 34).
- All forms of funding from foreign institutions inside or outside Egypt are prohibited.
- Founders and those involved in the "establishment" of trade unions which contradict these rules can be sentenced to up to three years in prison and/or fined between 5000 LE-20,000 LE, approximately EUR 250-1,000. (Article 54).

8. Article 1 of Decree Law 136/2014 states that the armed forces shall assist the police in protecting public facilities and property, including stations and networks electricity towers, gas lines and oil fields, railways, road networks, bridges and other facilities. Article 2 places crimes committed in these locations under the "jurisdiction of the military judiciary," permitting "the public prosecutor to refer the issues related to these crimes to the competent military prosecutor."

c. Public Assembly

In November 2013, Interim President Adly Mansour issued Law no. 107 of 2013 on the Right to Public Meetings, Processions and Peaceful Demonstrations, requiring organisers of such gatherings of more than 10 persons to notify the Ministry of Interior three days in advance. The law gives security forces the power to ban protests or meetings if they have information or evidence of a threat to peace and security. It also permits security to use force to disperse demonstrations or meetings if a criminal act is committed by any of the participants. Law no. 10 of 1914 also criminalises and imposes harsh penalties on assemblies of five or more people if authorities consider the gathering a threat to public peace.

d. Right to Strike

The absence of independent trade unions undermines the right of workers to strike as provided for by Article 192 of the Labour Law no. 12 of 2003, which stipulates the right to peaceful strike by workers as long as it is declared or approved within their trade union organisations. Article 194 of the same law prohibits strikes altogether in certain strategic sectors which are determined by the prime minister. Article 124 of Egypt's Penal Code stipulates penalties of three months to one year in prison for civil servants who deliberately refrain from performing their duties at work as a form of strike.

e. Prohibiting Public Interest Litigation

Decree-law no. 32 of 2014, originally passed under interim President Adly Mansour, banned third-party challenges to contracts signed between the government and investors. The law was a reaction to 11 successful cases brought by HRDs, including lawyers at the ECESR, which challenged corrupt privatization deals made during the Mubarak era. HRDs are challenging the law in the Constitutional Court.

f. State of Emergency and Exceptional Courts

Sisi declared a state of emergency for three months in April 2017 following two terrorists attacks on Coptic Churches in Tanta and Alexandria cities. It was renewed several times, most recently in October 2018 for a period of three months. Under Emergency Law no. 162 of 1958, security forces have broad powers to detain individuals, inspect private places without a judicial warrant and disrupt public meetings or assemblies. Civilians who commit any crimes can be tried before State Security emergency courts. Sentences handed down by these courts cannot be appealed, only confirmed for implementation by approval of the President.

g. NGO Repression and Foreign Funding Restrictions

The activities of labour rights defenders have been also curtailed and criminalised by the state's hostile attitude and policies toward NGOs, particularly the human rights sector. A significant crackdown on Egyptian human rights NGOs has been taking place since 2014. As part of Case No. 173 (2011), also known as the "foreign funding" case, 37 Egyptian human rights organisations, including labour rights groups such as the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights, have faced charges, with some leaders and staff members of human rights organisations charged with "receipt of illegal foreign funding" and "working without legal permission". As part of this case, several HRDs have been subject to travel bans or have had their personal and/or organizational assets frozen. The basis of the case stems from NGO Law no. 84 of 2002 which regulated the establishment and functioning of NGOs and which was replaced in May 2017 by another restrictive law, Law no. 70 of 2017. Both laws have provided the state with the means to exercise political and security control over the work of NGOs, including restricting access to foreign funding and the ability to join international associations. They also provided the government the power to dissolve organisations.



Thousands of workers at Egypt's biggest textile company strike for minimum wage, payment of delayed bonuses, and a change in company leadership, Mahalla, February 2014.

Photo: Mai Shaheen

Fatma Ramadan

“Previously we saw small results from strikes and protests, now we see nothing. The government message right now is that striking does not get you rights, it gets you fired and on military trial.” - Fatma Ramadan, WHRD and labour leader, Cairo

Fatma Ramadan is one of the most prominent women in the modern history of Egyptian labour activism and a former board member of the EFITU. She suspended her membership in June 2014 when the union’s independence waned in the first years of Sisi’s rule. Despite decades of vocal labour activism and a prominent role in multiple independent labour movements, she reports having drastically reduced her human rights work since 2014 due to threat of arrest and military prosecution.

“Everyone asking for their rights is arrested and sent to military or state security courts – look at Aswan, Alexandria and Suez. The arrests related to labour are illogical and random. A 66-year-old man was arrested last week for speaking publicly about the history of the labour movement. We can’t detect a pattern, create a plan, rule out certain activities, or choose others. Strategizing is useless under an illogical regime. The authorities have simply sent the message that anyone can be arrested at any time. Mass arrests and military trials are so common that everyone is effectively at risk. Especially after Decree 136, virtually every space in Egypt is a ‘military campus,’ meaning to organize on it could land you in military court. My colleagues are inactive and afraid.

“It’s not necessarily that all workers know the details of Sisi’s presidential decrees, but the media has been stigmatizing protests since 2013. People are deathly afraid of being called a threat to national security or an Islamist, because this too is a straight path to a military trial.”



Thousands of workers at Egypt's biggest textile company strike for minimum wage, payment of delayed bonuses, and a change in company leadership, Mahalla, February 2014.

Photo: Mai Shaheen

IV. Case Study: French Naval Group and the Alexandria Shipyard Military Trial

“Civilians cannot stand trial before military courts except for crimes that represent a direct assault against military facilities, military barracks, or whatever falls under their authority; stipulated military or border zones; its equipment, vehicles, weapons, ammunition, documents, military secrets, public funds or military factories”

- Article 204, 2014 Egyptian Constitution

“The military owns the factory. The civilian workers in it are treated like soldiers. They staged a two-day peaceful sit-in and are now on military trial.”

- Mohammed Ahmed, HRD & lawyer, Alexandria

French company Naval Group is involved in an arms deal worth more than €1 billion with an Alexandria factory owned and operated by the Egyptian military. In May 2016, workers at the factory went on strike; 26 civilian workers and strike leaders from the factory are now on trial in a military court. Managerial staff from the French company were present at Alexandria Shipyard during the strike, lockout, mass firings and ongoing military trial of HRDs and workers.

A. Alexandria Shipyard Case

In May 2016, hundreds of workers in the Alexandria Shipyard Company staged an open-ended sit-in to protest low wages, which they said fell far below the national monthly minimum wage.⁹ More than two dozen workers and HRDs were arrested and charged with instigating a labour strike, held in detention for more than five months, forced to resign from their jobs. Nearly two years later, they remain on trial in a military court. Their lawyer is HRD Mohammed Ahmed. He has been threatened with arrest, questioned at his office by State Security officers and threatened at gunpoint at the military court for defending the workers' rights to peacefully assemble.

Military Factory

Founded in 1962, the Alexandria Shipyard Company has been owned and administered by Egypt's Ministry of Defence since 2007.¹⁰ In 2003, the Ministry

of Defence created the Maritime Industries and Services Organisation (MIASO) through a Presidential Decree. MIASO is a military-controlled body which owns Alexandria Shipyard, Nile Company for River Transportation, and Egyptian Ship Repair and Building Company. Egyptian naval officers now head the companies. As a result, Egyptian authorities hold HRD and civilian employees subject to military law, prosecution and trial.¹¹

Peaceful Strike

In the May 2016 sit-in, Alexandria Shipyard workers said they protested for minimum wage, safety gear, security equipment the factory had denied them, and against a decrease in their annual Ramadan bonus – a critical part of the take-home pay for working class Egyptians. It had recently been changed to match the bonus paid to junior Egyptian soldiers. According

9. A national monthly minimum wage of LE1,200 was established for public sector workers in 2014.

10. <http://www.alexyard.com.eg/single.html>

11. Interview with Mohammed Ahmed, Alexandria.

to the workers' lawyer, HRD Mohammed Ahmed, military officials decided that workers employed by a military-owned factory were only owed bonuses commensurate with those paid to other Ministry of Defence staff, further cementing their treatment as military personnel.¹²

During the May 2016 protest, workers used a traditional labour rights tactic: they did not stop production entirely, instead working and demonstrating in shifts. Supporters of the strike say this did not threaten national security, as the government alleges. On the second day of the sit-in, naval officers negotiated with the demonstrators; HRDs representing the group reiterated their demands.

B. Military Prosecution

Military prosecution summoned 26 workers for investigation (case 2759/2016). Among them, six were known for advocating labour reforms at the factory in the past. Fourteen of the summoned workers went to the prosecution for investigation and were subsequently detained and questioned. Mohammed Ahmed, the lawyer for the workers, attempted to convince the military prosecution that civilians should not be under investigation by the military. The prosecution refused to release the workers and HRDs, indicating that they would instead be transferred to their local police stations and released later that day. But the workers were held for an additional four days. The 26 workers under investigation included administrative office workers and engineers with no connection to the sit-in. Egyptian authorities often include large numbers of defendants in the same case, both active HRDs and workers who did not plan or even participate in the strike, so as to increase tensions within the community and complicate the defence for lawyers.

“Some of the arrests were random, but others were clearly targeted because they had been visible community advocates in the past. Several had spoken

Military Lockout

Military police units and Central Security Forces were deployed in and around the shipyard, and management imposed a military-backed lockout preventing workers from entering the factory to perform their jobs. The factory's 2,300-strong workforce was indefinitely suspended.

On 25 May, workers went to the nearby Mina al-Basal Police Station to file a complaint against the management's lockout, demanding to know why they were not being allowed to work. At the station, they were informed that the military had opened an investigation into 15 workers' alleged participation in the sit-in.

publicly on labour rights, factory safety, and fair pay at the Shipyard.” - HRD Mohammed Ahmed, lawyer for the 26 Alexandria Shipyard workers

Military prosecutors accused the HRDs and workers of inciting a labour strike and disrupting the company's operations. They charged the HRDs and civilian workers with violating Article 124 of Egypt's Penal Code, which states that civil servants who deliberately refrain from performing work duties may be imprisoned or fined. The detainees were held for up to six months and only released after resigning from their jobs. As of November 2018, all 26 workers remain unemployed, out of detention and on military trial awaiting a verdict. The verdict has been postponed more than 30 times in two years, and hundreds of Shipyard employees are still barred from the factory.

“Years later, and despite being forced out of their jobs, the 26 workers are still on trial and could still be sentenced to prison, or issued a suspended sentence. There is no guarantee that their resignations will amount to acquittals before the military court.” - HRD Mohammed Ahmed

12. Interview with Mohammed Ahmed, Alexandria.

C. Testimony: Mohammed Ahmed, HRD & Lawyer



Mohammed Ahmed is a HRD and lawyer in Alexandria. He currently represents the Alexandria Shipyard workers. He is one of the few human rights lawyers in the governorate litigating in military courts – something he learned to do in 2013 when the number of civilians referred to military trials skyrocketed after Sisi came to power. He has been intimidated, harassed, threatened with arrest, surveilled, and routinely accused of having links to “terrorism” for his defence of Egyptians’ right to a fair trial. As he continues to work to provide legal counsel to civilians in military courts, he regularly receives violent threats and degrading treatment by military officials, guards, and court officials. During one incident in 2016, he described how a military prosecutor threatened him at the entrance to the military court after he refused an invasive and humiliating public body search. The same prosecutor was the judge in the Alexandria Shipyard case, and instructed a guard to draw his gun and point it at Ahmed.

“I was in court that day for a separate military trial of civilians, but it was clear that the armed threat was in retaliation for defending the Shipyard workers. People have been killed outside of military courts for angering guards, so this is not a hollow threat. On another day, when the workers had been in detention for months, I was trying to negotiate their release with the prosecutor. He responded, ‘Well. At least for now you are free.’ Since then, my biggest fear is not the ongoing threats or surveillance at my office, but that my home will be raided at night. I’m scared for my family.”

Ahmed has faced ongoing intimidation, threats, and harassment for the more than two years he has represented the workers. Security officials visit his office to question and intimidate him and his staff related to his work on military trials and the Alexandria Shipyard case.



Timeline: Military Trial

The trial was postponed and a verdict delayed more than thirty times between June 2016 and October 2018. Several of the workers and HRDs were held in arbitrary detention for up to five months, and only released after signing agreements to resign from their jobs.

- **24 May 2016:** A military prosecutor refers 26 shipyard workers, among them HRDs, to military trial. Fourteen workers report to the police following a summons for investigation; authorities detain all 14. The remaining 12 did not turn themselves in to police custody. The Alexandria Shipyard imposes a lockout, one day after the peaceful sit-in begins. All of the company’s approximately 2,300 workers are refused entry by military police.
- **June 2016:** A military prosecutor charges the 26 workers with instigating strikes and obstructing operations at the company. A verdict is due 2 August 2016. Fourteen workers remain in detention.
- **September 2016:** A military official in Cairo advised workers’ families, without the presence of a lawyer, that legal charges might be dismissed if the company receives formal resignation from the workers. Five workers submit their resignation letters in an attempt to secure release.
- **October 2016:** The five workers who submitted their resignation letters are released on bail, but the charges are not dropped. Several other detained workers begin tendering their resignations. The military court of Alexandria delays issuing a verdict for the fifth time and adjourns court proceedings until 15 November. Approximately 1,000 workers of the total workforce of 2,300 are allowed back on the company’s premises. Jailed workers have only been paid half of their basic wages in the five months they have been detained. Over 1,000 workers remain barred from entering the shipyard, and have large portions of their expected take-home pay withheld.
- **November 2016:** The military court of Alexandria issues release order for remaining 9 detainees after they tender their resignations. Court postpones verdict for the sixth time to December 20.
- **December 2016:** Verdict is postponed for the seventh time, due on 24 January 2017. Four of the 11 workers who were not detained submit their resignation in an attempt to avoid sentencing.
- **October 2018:** all 26 workers remain unemployed, out of detention and on trial awaiting a verdict. The verdict has been postponed more than 30 times in two years.

D. French Naval Group

French company Naval Group (formerly DCNS) is majority owned by the French state. It has signed defence contracts worth more than €3b with Egypt since 2014: four GOWIND corvettes (three of which are due to be produced at Alexandria Shipyard), one FREMM multi-purpose frigate and accompanying armaments, and two MISTRAL-class projection and command ships.¹³

The GOWIND contract, for which manufacturing is under way at Alexandria Shipyard, is perhaps the most significant as it was the first contract signed with Naval Group under Sisi, worth nearly €1b.¹⁴

The 2014 Egyptian order for the GOWIND ships was placed by Sisi when he was Minister of Defence.^{15 16} The first ship was constructed in France beginning April 2015 and delivered to the Egyptian Navy in September 2017, following which Sisi met with Naval Group CEO Hervé Guillou in Paris in October 2017.¹⁷ Naval Group announced that the remaining three ships would be “built by Egyptian partner Alexandria Shipyard.”^{18 19}

While Naval Group signed a contract with the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, not Alexandria Shipyard, sections of the contract, seen by Front Line Defenders, contain a number of provisions establishing a direct relationship between Naval Group and Alexandria Shipyard. They outline a “permanent” presence of Naval Group staff on site at the factory. Public statements issued by Naval Group and the Ministry of Defence regarding the production of the GOWIND ships since 2014 also demonstrate the ongoing presence of the French company’s staff and contractors at the Alexandria Shipyard while violations against labour rights defenders, including prosecution in a military court, took place.

Presence On Site

A source close to Alexandria Shipyard reports that between 2014 and 2018 between 15 and 25 Naval group staff and contractors were present daily on site, with

numbers depending on the GOWIND production stage.

In 2015, the company said it had “sent supervision and technical assistance teams to Alexandria for the construction of three corvettes through technology transfer.”²⁰ In April 2016, one month before the sit-in began, Naval Group reported that Alexandria Shipyard “started cutting metal for the first GOWIND 2500 corvette built in Egypt, in the presence of high representatives of the Egyptian Navy and of [Naval Group] technical assistance and management teams.” Also in April, Naval Group’s press director published a Tweet announcing the start of production of the second GOWIND, in the presence of French staff in Alexandria.²¹

The contract between the French company and the Egyptian Ministry of Defence states that to support the ships’ construction in Egypt, Naval Group will deploy a permanent team within the construction premises. The contract provides for two teams from Naval Group to be



13. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/news/dcns-changes-its-name-to-naval-group/>
 14. The 1 billion euro estimate excludes the price Egypt is set to pay for the missiles, MBDA VL Mica and Exocet, to accompany the ships.
 15. <https://www.la Tribune.fr/entreprises-finance/industrie/aeronautique-defense/20140304trib000818235/l-egypte-sur-le-point-de-s-offrir-quatre-gowind-de-dcns-pour-1-milliard-d-euros.html>
 16. <https://militaryedge.org/armaments/gowind-corvette/>
 17. <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/newsnaval-group-delivers-first-gowind-2500-corvette-to-egyptian-navy-5932953/>
 18. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/news/beginning-of-construction-of-the-first-gowind-2500-corvette-built-in-egypt/>
 19. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/news/dcns-starts-the-construction-of-the-first-gowind-2500-corvette-for-the-egyptian-navy/>
 20. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/news/beginning-of-construction-of-the-first-gowind-2500-corvette-built-in-egypt/>
 21. <https://twitter.com/EmmanuelGaudez/status/721727018182799360>

present at the Shipyard throughout the duration of the manufacturing period:

1. Supplier Supervision Team: Comprised of Naval Group staff to perform inspections and raise any deviations with the Government of Egypt. The contract stipulates that the Supervision team will stay in the Client’s premises (Alexandria Shipyard).
2. Technical Advisory Team: Comprised of Naval Group staff or its subcontractors personnel.

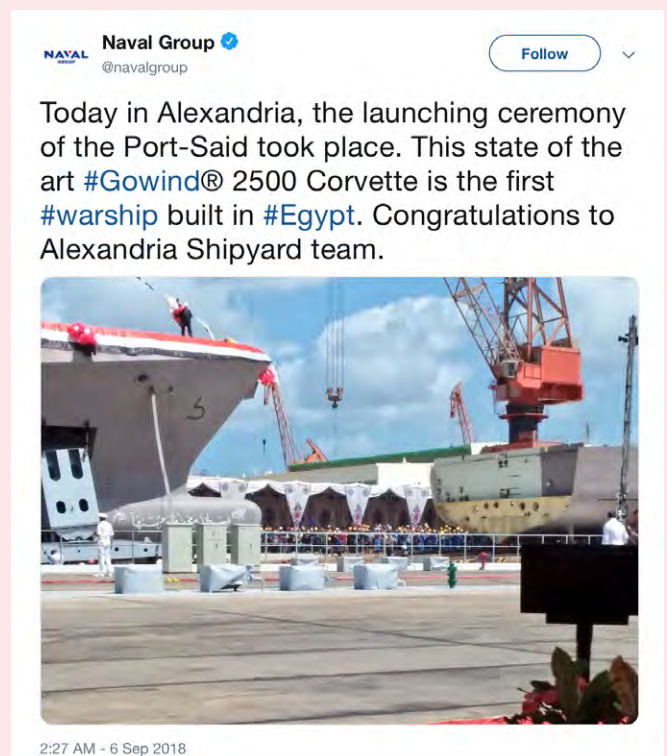
According to the contract, the Government of Egypt is responsible for staffing the production of the ship with trained builders, and must provide Naval Group staff on site with a range of amenities that demonstrate the permanence of the French company’s staff presence at the Shipyard. These include: a meeting room, changing room, showers, telephone and internet lines, several storage rooms, and car park, to which Naval Group staff must be provided “permanent” access.

Additional Communications

Since the start of the military trial of HRDs and workers in Alexandria, Naval Group has issued a number of public statements affirming its commitment to deepening ties with the Shipyard.

On 2 June 2016, less than two weeks after the military lock-out, detention and military prosecution of workers began, Naval Group published Tweets announcing the delivery of the first Mistral LHD to Egypt, at a ceremony attended by Hervé Guillou, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Naval Group, Egyptian and French Navies’ Chiefs of Staff, and senior Egyptian and French officials.²²

On 6 September 2016 – while 14 workers remained in detention – Naval Group congratulated “the Alexandria Shipyard team” at the launch ceremony of the first GOWIND corvette. Another Tweet the same day stated: “This morning, Naval Group celebrates the success of industrial cooperation. Alexandria Shiyard entirely built this state-of-art military vessel”²³



22. <https://twitter.com/NavyRecognition/status/738353060171386880>
 23. <https://twitter.com/navalgroup/status/1037641042533789697>

E. Increasing France-Egypt Defence Trade

France became a major supplier for arms deals with the Sisi administration when military transfers to Egypt were temporarily embargoed by the Obama administration following a violent crackdown on peaceful protesters in 2014.

France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website states (as of October 2018):

"Bilateral relations between France and Egypt ... have developed considerably in all areas over the last three years. High-level bilateral meetings have increased considerably ... and Egypt is a key partner in the fight against terrorism. This partnership draws

on close defence cooperation. On 16 February 2015, Egypt signed a €5.2 billion contract for the purchase of 24 Rafal fighter aircraft, a multi-mission frigate and missiles. On 10 October 2015, it signed a further agreement for the purchase of two Mistral-class force projection and command vessels, and on 17 April 2016 it signed another for the acquisition of a military communications satellite."²⁴

When French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian travelled to Cairo to sign a €5.2bn contract, Egypt became the first ever foreign buyer for France's Rafal planes, replacing its former reliance on American F-16s.

F. Financial Importance for Naval Group

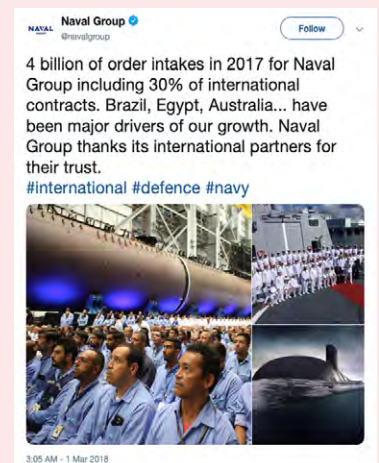
As the arms trade between the France and Egypt expanded, Naval Group won contracts for the majority of deals. According to the company's 2015 financial report, by the second year into Sisi's presidency, Naval Group was operating the three major contracts in Egypt, including the GOWIND contract at the Alexandria Shipyard company.²⁷

In 2014, Naval Group incurred losses of more than €336 million, forcing it to open 2015 with a public statement acknowledging its massive financial losses the previous year. The statement, however, promised that 2015 would be a much more profitable year – due to the massive order for GOWIND corvettes placed by the Egyptian military.²⁸

According to the statement, orders placed in 2014 increased by an unprecedented 59% to reach a total value of €3.6 billion, more than one-quarter of which was for the GOWIND deal. Herve Guillou, president and CEO of Naval Group, stated:

"The orders placed for 4 GOWIND corvettes for Egypt in July 2014 allowed DCNS to exceed its own forecasts. Our approach with the Egyptian Navy and its shipyards, and more generally with regard to the Group's international development, is a long-term one."²⁹

In 2015, nearly €2b in sales to Egypt accounted for more than half of Naval Group's total sales for the year: the February FREMM sale and the October sale of two Mistral-class Landing Helo Docks (LHDs) with accompanying maintenance packet were each worth approximately €1b.^{30 31}



Consequently, Naval Group was able to generate net profits and increase its profitability over the following three years to 2017. Naval Group stated that this increase in profitability was due to increases in revenue from its international sales, which accounted for 35% of its total revenue in 2016 and 35% in 2017. Egypt was, and has remained, one of the main "powerful growth drivers" for the company.³²

In March 2018, Naval Group published a Tweet stating: "4 billion of order intakes in 2017 for Naval Group including 30% of international contracts. Brazil, Egypt, Australia... have been major drivers of our growth. Naval Group thanks its international partners for their trust."³³

24. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/egypt/france-and-egypt/>

25. <http://www.france24.com/en/20150212-egypt-agrees-deal-buy-french-fighter-jets-rafale>

26. <http://www.france24.com/en/20150216-france-egypt-sign-deal-sale-rafale-fighter-jets>

27. <https://www.naval-group.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/rfi-2015-dcns-en-planche.pdf> as of 2015 financial report

28. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/news/after-significant-losses-in-2014-dcns-foresees-a-progressive-return-to-profitability-in-2015/>

29. <https://www.naval-group.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/pr-dcns-2014-results-doc.pdf>

30. <https://foxtrotalpha.jalopnik.com/why-is-egypt-buying-two-orphaned-mistral-class-aircraft-1732595299>

31. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/news/dcns-salutes-the-departure-from-france-of-the-fremm-tahya-misr-of-the-egyptian-navy-for-its-home-port-in-alexandria/>

32. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/news/2017-results-for-the-third-year-running-naval-group-improves-its-operating-profitability/>

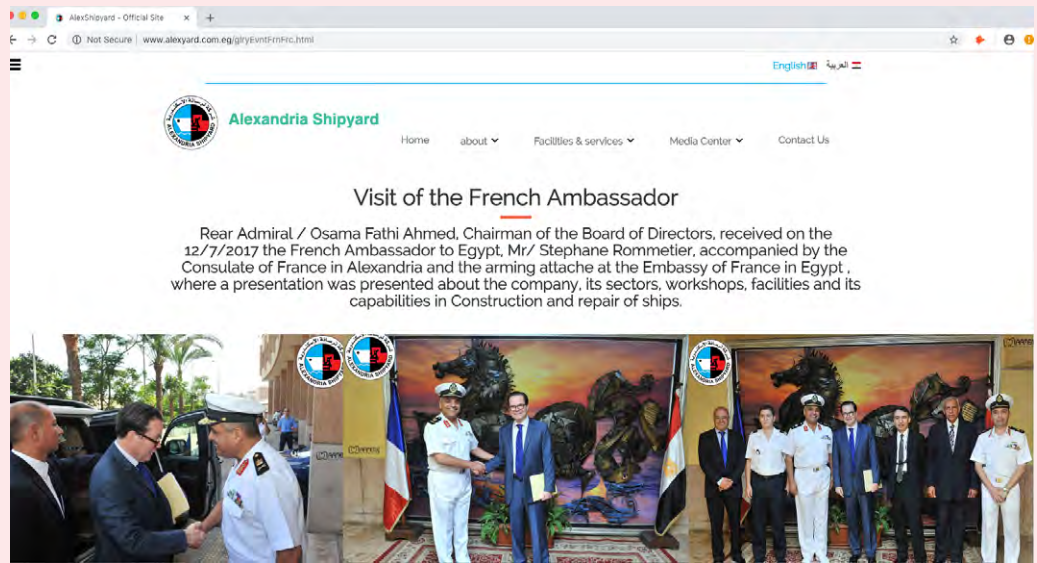
33. <https://twitter.com/navalgroup/status/969166750230155264>

G. French State Ownership

As of 31 December 2017, 62.25% of the company is owned by the French state, 35% by the French aerospace and transportation company Thales, 1.80% by current and former members of staff and less than one percent by the company itself.³⁴ Agence des participations de l'État (APE) is a government shareholding agency of the French Republic, managing the state's portfolio of holdings in 81 countries.³⁵ Via APE, the French state owns nearly two-thirds of Naval Group.

On its website the company highlights the importance of its international presence to its relationship with the French military: "Through its experience of major programs, in particular in an international context, and as the No. 1 supplier to the French Navy, a first-rate navy, Naval Group intends to accelerate the profitable development of its international activities through a sustainable presence on these markets."³⁶

Throughout the military trial of HRDs, French state and military officials visited the factory multiple times. In July 2017, French Ambassador to Egypt Stephane Rommetier visited the Shipyard. According to Alexandria Shipyard's website, he was "accompanied by the Consulate of France in Alexandria and the arming attache at the Embassy of France in Egypt," hosted by Rear Admiral Osama Fathi Ahmed, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Alexandria Shipyard, and received a presentation "about the company, its sectors, workshops, facilities and its capabilities in Construction and repair of ships."³⁷



34. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/group/en-profil/en-gouvernance/>

35. Annual Report 2016-2017, L'Agence des participations de l'État.

https://www.economie.gouv.fr/files/files/directions_services/agence-participations-etat/Annual_Report_APE_2016-2017.pdf

36. Strategic Issues, Expanding into the international market. Naval group. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/group/en-strategie/strategic-issues/>. Accessed 15 April 2018.

37. <http://www.alexyard.com.eg/glryEvntFrnFrc.html>. Accessed 30 November 2018.

H. CSR & Duty of Vigilance

Naval Group publicly declares a commitment to various corporate social responsibility codes and highlights its efforts to ensure these standards are maintained at the international level by all its partners. This includes a commitment to “responsible growth” which is “based, in particular, on the development of long lasting, constructive relationships with all its stakeholders, a dynamic innovation policy and demanding ethical imperatives.”³⁸ It also “advocates zero tolerance with respect to unethical conduct and has set up an integrity program which places particular emphasis on relationships with the group’s partners.”³⁹

Naval Group’s website includes a whistle blowing hotline number. However, the lawyer representing the Alexandria workers was unaware of the hotline, information about which is only available in French and English. Naval Group’s public CSR commitments do not contain information about how complaints are handled in the event one is filed, nor about any due diligence performed before beginning new projects.

UN Global Compact

Naval Group joined the United Nations Global Compact, the world’s largest corporate social responsibility initiative, in 2014, “affirming its adherence to a global community of companies committed to upholding human rights, labour standards, the protection of the environment and the promotion of joint anti-corruption principles.”⁴⁰ The UN Global Compact is entirely voluntary and has no enforcement mechanism. It does not assess or judge performance.

The group displays the UN Global Compact 10 Principles on its website, and completed a largely positive self-assessment of its progress in 2017.⁴¹ The first three principles were and continue to be directly violated by Alexandria Shipyard company during the period of ongoing construction of Naval Group’s ships:

- Principle 1 Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
- Principle 2 Make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.
- Principle 3 Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

OECD Guidelines

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), of which France is a founder,

member, and hosts the headquarters in Paris, has Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises which include companies’ responsibilities to “seek ways to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their business operations, products or services by a business relationship, even if they do not contribute to those impacts.” (section IV, point 3). The Guidelines further stipulate:

“A State’s failure either to enforce relevant domestic laws, or to implement international human rights obligations or the fact that it may act contrary to such laws or international obligations does not diminish the expectation that enterprises respect human rights. In countries where domestic laws and regulations conflict with internationally recognised human rights, enterprises should seek ways to honour them to the fullest extent which does not place them in violation of domestic law, consistent with paragraph 2 of the Chapter on Concepts and Principles.”⁴²

French Duty of Vigilance Law

The French National Assembly (Assemblée nationale) adopted a law in February 2017 defining a “duty of vigilance” for companies to prevent human rights violations and environmental damages. The law applies to, among others, companies headquartered in France that employ at least 10,000 employees worldwide including through direct and indirect subsidiaries.⁴³ The law states that companies covered by the law must establish and effectively implement a vigilance plan, along with mechanisms to prevent human rights violations and environmental damages throughout their supply chain.

The vigilance plan must include steps to identify and prevent violations of health and safety, human rights, and environmental protection. It should detail how the company will undertake risk mapping and mitigation, establishing warning and reporting mechanisms, and regular monitoring to assess efficacy of the plan. The plan must also cover activities of suppliers and subcontractors with which the company and its subsidiaries have an “established commercial relationship.” As the Alexandria Shipyard has been owned and operated, via MIASO, by the Egyptian Ministry of Defense, with which Naval Group signed multiple contracts, Naval Group has a duty of vigilance under French law to identify and prevent human rights violations at the Shipyard.

38/39. Economic Development. Naval Group. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/group/company-social-responsibility/economic-development/>. Accessed 30 November 2018.
 40. <https://www.naval-group.com/en/group/company-social-responsibility/csr-at-the-heart-of-our-development/>
 41. <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/participation/report/cop/create-and-submit/advanced/418296>
 42. OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. 2011 Edition. <http://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/mne/48004323.pdf>
 43. <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/pdf/ta/ta0924.pdf>

Code of Conduct

Naval Group’s 2018 Code of Conduct, published October 2018, states that the company’s “sources [are] in compliance with French law, notably ... the law related to the corporate duty of vigilance for parent and instructing companies. ... Naval Group has defined a vigilance plan based on risk mapping and including reasonable vigilance measures intended to prevent serious breaches of ethics and the CSR, resulting from the activities of the group and those of its subcontractors, service providers or suppliers.”⁴⁴

The Code of Conduct goes on to list specific standards to which Naval Group holds its subcontractors, service providers and suppliers, including several which explicitly highlight the rights of workers to organize and form unions:

- "ILO conventions, i.e.: No. 87 on freedom of association and the right to organize and No. 98 on the right to organize and collective bargaining;"
- “based on applicable legal requirements, comply with and recognize the right of each employee to collectively bargain, to form or participate in a trade union of their choice without any penalty.”

The standards to which Naval Group’s Code of Conduct holds subcontractors, service providers and suppliers have been violated repeatedly at the Alexandria Shipyard, including during the more than two years that Naval Group staff have been on site during the ongoing military trial of workers and HRDs.



Workers demonstrate at Alexandria Shipyard, May 2016. Photo: via CTUWS

44. <https://www.naval-group.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/naval-group-supplier-code-of-conduct.pdf>

V. Arrest, Detention, Imprisonment

Egyptian workers who organise labour rights movements in factories, hospitals, oil companies and transportation centres have been arrested, interrogated, and often charged with criminal offences related to their peaceful labour rights activism. The most common accusations and charges include instigating a strike, halting or obstructing production, and membership in a banned group – widely understood to be the Muslim Brotherhood.



Thousands of workers at Egypt's biggest textile company strike for minimum wage, payment of delayed bonuses, and a change in company leadership, Mahalla, February 2014.

Photo: Mai Shaheen

Arrests have occurred before, during, and after planned sit-ins and strikes, at which large numbers of workers and HRDs are often usually detained at once. In several instances, security forces have raided HRDs' work dormitories and family homes at night. The independent Egyptian initiative DemoMeter, which tracks popular movements and mobilisations across the country, documented at least 151 workers and unionists arrested, prosecuted or referred to trial between Labour Day (1 May) 2016 and Labour Day 2017.⁴⁵ While the vast majority of arrests and detentions occurred in connection to a strike or sit-in, Front Line Defenders spoke with one WHRD who was violently detained while attempting to enter a union meeting and distribute legal information packets related to labour rights.

After arrests, authorities often pressure detained HRDs and workers into resigning from their jobs in exchange for release on bail. In several cases, State Security

officials and military officers have threatened detainees' families to persuade the workers and HRDs to resign. Resignations often lead to release, but in several cases criminal charges were not dropped and HRDs remain on civilian or military trial even after leaving their jobs.

Instances of mass arrest, detention, or prosecution of workers related to their labour rights activism occurring from June 2016 to October 2018 include:

- June 2016: 26 workers at Alexandria Shipyard company were prosecuted by a military court for staging peaceful protests, several were detained for up to five months, and all remain on trial as of November 2018. See section IV.
- December 2016: 55 workers from two privately owned fertilizer companies in Suez were arrested in dawn raids for organizing and participating in a strike. All were released except five well-known

45. <https://demometer.blogspot.ie/2017/04/744-2016-2017.html>



*Thousands of workers at Egypt's biggest textile company strike for minimum wage, payment of delayed bonuses, and a change in company leadership, Mahalla, February 2014.
Photo: Mai Shaheen*

labour rights defenders, who were remanded in custody for 15 days and investigated on accusation of instigating a strike and obstructing work. The HRDs were tried for inciting strikes and obstructing production, and acquitted by the Suez Misdemeanour Court on 25 February 2017.⁴⁶

- January 2017: Authorities charged 19 workers and trade union leaders from an oil company in Suez with halting production and inciting a strike at an oil products factory, following a peaceful sit-in in December 2016. A Suez Court found them innocent, but 17 – including the president, vice president and secretary general of a local trade union – were prevented from returning to work and had “damage” deductions taken from their salaries.
- February 2017: Five WHRDs and female workers were arrested at the El-Ghazl factory in Mahalla, one of the biggest textile companies in Egypt where over 20,000 workers are employed in eight factories. The labour rights defenders were arrested after approximately 3,000 workers (mostly women) were on strike for two days to demand payment of withheld benefits.⁴⁷ The strike ended after the arrest of the five women and threats to others.
- April 2017: Using Egypt’s anti-protest legislation, 16 workers from a telecom company in Cairo and Giza were arrested for peacefully demonstrating to demand unpaid wages and an increase in salaries.

At least nine more workers in Suez Canal were arrested for protesting in front of the company’s officers in Ramses against the continued detention of their colleagues. One known HRD and strike leader was interrogated and accused of using social media to incite a strike and harm public interest, before all workers were released following solidarity protests at dozens of telecommunications hubs across the country.

- June 2017: 32 workers from a cement company in were sentenced to three years in prison after being charged with obstructing justice, assaulting a police captain, and using violence to resist authorities. They were arrested after police dispersed a sit-in on 22 May demanding full-time contracts and retroactive pay for more than a decade of partially unpaid wages. The trial was delayed several times in May when police failed to transport the detained workers to court. Families, independent observers, and journalists were barred from entering the court room. Two weeks after the three year sentence was issued, and following a large national and international labour rights campaign in solidarity with the workers, a Cairo appeals court reduced the sentence to two months. The appeals court found them innocent of all charges except “resisting authorities,” ruling that they obstructed police by assisting a wanted worker to escape the premises.

46.
47.

<http://www.ctuws.com/en/content/report-violations-trade-unions%E2%80%99-freedomsin-darkness-tunnel-january-june-2017>

“We are entitled to a 600 Egyptian pounds (around US\$ 33) development bonus [editor’s note: one of several bonuses paid to public sector workers to compensate for their low basic salary], but we are only getting EGP 360 (around US\$ 19),” said a female worker at el-Ghazl who spoke to Equal Times on the condition of anonymity. “Some of our colleagues have won court orders to force the company to pay them the EGP 600, but they have not yet been implemented.”
<https://www.equaltimes.org/textile-strike-clampdown-a-sign-of>

- July 2017: Three workers died at an Aswan cement plant when an unidentified substance spilled into a worker area and burned them to death. Workers went on strike to demand an investigation into the deaths and the plant's safety procedures. Police raided the workers' dorms and arrested 25 people. When other workers tried to follow them to the station in solidarity and for protection, the company threatened that anyone leaving the factory campus would be fired. Authorities later released 17 detainees. Eight remained on trial for nearly one year on charges of obstructing means of production, inciting strike, using violence and threatening public employees. Charges were dropped in May 2018.
- September 2017: A leading HRD and labour organiser from the Public Transportation Authority was detained and questioned along with five of his colleagues, among them strike organizers. All six were later interrogated and accused of membership of a banned group.
- October 2018: Eight nurses, including WHRD and labour rights activist Sayda Fayed, were arrested at night and detained at Helwan station in Cairo without access to a lawyer or their families, who were not able to speak with them until more than two days after their arrest. Sayda was charged with membership in a banned group and distributing false information, an allegation she has faced repeatedly in the past related to her distributing articles on labour rights, trade unions and freedom of association. The nurses were released and charged dropped in November 2018.



Testimony: Tarek El-Beahry, HRD and transportation worker, Cairo

On 24 September 2016, six workers from the Public Transport Authority were detained, interrogated, and accused of inciting strikes, disturbing public order, and Muslim Brotherhood membership. HRD Tarek El-Beahry was asked to report to National Security on a Friday evening, where he was detained and interrogated about his activism and history of organising strikes at a Public Transportation Authority bus garage in Cairo. During the four-hour interrogation, National Security officers repeatedly accused him of "forming a terrorist cell" based out of the garage. While he was being questioned throughout the night and early morning, authorities raided the homes of five of his colleagues and fellow strike organizers. Police demanded their Facebook passwords and then searched the private messages and posts of the detainees.

The workers were denied access to lawyers and their families for four days. The families held a press conference demanding to know their whereabouts, and on 28 September the six workers appeared before prosecutors. They were accused of belonging to an unidentified "banned group," though during the original interrogation police had explicitly referred to the Muslim Brotherhood. Four were released, while two, including El-Beahry, were held in pre-trial detention for three months.

"I spent 73 days in Torah prison, then an additional 17 in Imbaba station near my house. Everyone says Torah is the worst, but the detention at Imbaba was worse. We were packed together with only room to stand, 38 of us in one cell. There wasn't room to sit or pray, we took turns squatting. When they let me go, an official from National Security told me not to meet with workers any more, not to lead any conversations or discussions at my [bus transportation centre] garage on Fridays, and said I had to report back to the police station every week for months. I've quieted down since then – I can't let my son go through this again."



VI. Threats to Lawyers & Lack of Representation

Access to legal representation has been a critical issue for labour rights defenders for decades. Class, geography, financial ability, and lack of connections to legal aid groups all hinder their ability to secure adequate legal representation.

Minister of Manpower Nahed al-Ashry stated in 2015 that while 15,000 workers had been dismissed since the January 2011 revolution, only a small number had filed lawsuits to claim their rights.⁴⁸ He seemed to imply that the workers had been justly dismissed and did not wish to seek financial compensation or a return of their jobs; instead the figures bely the massive lack of legal representation available to enable them to take their cases to court.

HRD lawyers with organizations like the CTUWS and ECESR have tried to fill the gaps, but several risks reduce the number of lawyers qualified and willing to take on dangerous labour rights cases.

a. Arrest & Disappearance

Sisi's regime is persecuting human rights lawyers with arrest, detention, disappearances, and torture. Lawyers interviewed in Cairo, Alexandria, and Mahalla have been threatened with arrest and disappearance when they attend court to represent their clients in labour rights cases. Most interviewed have been surveilled, intimidated, and threatened at their offices and homes by state intelligence officers. Several report that this type of intimidation increases when they are working on labour trials in military or State Security courts.

b. Military Law

Lawyers need a high level of expertise in Egypt's complex military legal system to successfully defend clients in military courts. Most lawyers who have this knowledge are aligned with or in the military themselves. This leaves the vast majority of civilians without adequate representation in military courts. Civilian human rights lawyers who pursue expertise in military law – in response to the huge numbers of civilians on military trial – have been threatened by the state for doing so.

c. Defamation

The government has used accusations of Muslim Brotherhood membership to lock up a wide range of political and civil society opposition. Coupled with the large state control over the media, the concept of military trials has become almost synonymous with Muslim Brotherhood membership. As such, lawyers defending civilians in military courts are frequently defamed as Islamists or supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, for simply defending their civilian clients' right to a fair trial.

As the military purchases more factories and centres of civilian employment, the issues of labour rights and military trials are intertwined. Human rights lawyers report growing fears that they will increasingly be forced to choose between working in military courts or allowing labour rights cases to go unrepresented.



Malek Adly, HRD & Lawyer, ECESR

Malek Adly is a human rights lawyer and director of the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights, one of the most prominent and long-standing organisations defending workers' rights in Egypt. Adly has been arrested, detained, tortured and had travel bans placed on him. Workers he defends are routinely threatened to seek alternate counsel. On 5 May 2016, Egyptian security forces arrested Adly in Cairo following an arrest warrant issued against him on 23 April 2016. He was brought to Maadi Police Station where officers blindfolded him, beat him with fire arms, stripped him of his clothing, and interrogated him about his human rights work. He was then transferred to Shubra al-Kheima police station. He was questioned again from 3am to 7am and then detained in a 6x8 foot cell with no lighting and little ventilation and charged with attempting to overthrow the government, affiliation with a banned organisation, and broadcasting false news.⁴⁹ He was released in August 2016 after 114 days in Torah prison.



48. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/minister-over-15000-workers-dismissed-following-25-january-revolution/>
 49. <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/judicial-harassment-and-travel-ban-against-malek-adly#case-update-id-4530>

CASE STUDY: Haythem Mohamadeen, HRD & Lawyer, El-Nadim

Haytham Mohamadeen is a lawyer and a labour rights defender who offers pro bono legal aid to workers. He is also a member of El-Nadim Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, an Egyptian NGO dedicated to combating torture and providing medical and legal support to victims of human rights violations. Mohamadeen has been arrested several times since Sisi came to power, and investigated on charges relating to both his defense of factory workers and his reputation as an activist supporting economic, social and cultural rights.

- On 5 September 2013, he was arrested by the Egyptian military at a check point in Suez while travelling on a bus from Cairo to meet with representatives of factory workers who had requested his legal counsel. No charges were filed, but he was detained for two days and investigated on suspicion of "threatening national security."⁵⁰
- On 22 April 2016, Mohamadeen was arrested from his home in Giza amidst a two-month long spate of attacks on civil society which saw more than 300 arbitrary arrests, abusive detentions, unlawful house raids, enforced disappearances, and unfair trials targeting civil society actors and human rights defenders. Mohamadeen was detained for six months on charges of "joining a banned group, participating in an illegal protest and plotting the overthrow of the ruling government." Charges were not dropped upon his release in October 2016.⁵¹
- On the night of the 15 May 2018, members of the police and National Security Agency arrested Mohamadeen at his home. The human rights defender was detained in an unknown location until he appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in New Cairo's Tagammu El-Khamis District on 19 May. He was detained until October 2018 and investigated on charges of "aiding a terrorist organisation to achieve its goals" and "calling for illegal protests," in relation to a socio-economic protest (regarding metro fares) in which he did not take part. He was supposed to be released on 10 October 2018, when the appeal of the State Security Prosecution to keep him on remand was rejected. Instead of executing the Court's decision to release Mohamadeen immediately, the State Security Prosecution disappeared him from 10 October 2018 until 29 October 2018. During this time, neither his family nor his lawyer were informed of the human rights defenders' whereabouts.⁵²
- As of October 2018, all 26 workers remain unemployed, out of detention and on trial awaiting a verdict. The verdict has been postponed more than 30 times in two years.

50. <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/release-haytham-mohamadeen#case-update-id-3317>

51. <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/release-haytham-mohamadeen#case-update-id-4380>

52. <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/detention-and-prosecution-haytham-mohamadeen#case-update-id-8489>

VII. Firing

HRDs working in public transportation, textile manufacturing, grain mills, cement factories, and nursing have been fired for peacefully advocating for the rights of workers in their company, hospital, or school. In several cases, authorities and company management have clearly targeted HRDs known for documenting violations, educating colleagues about labour laws, and leading strikes.

Several HRDs reported that upon seeking redress with management or local police after being fired as a result of their activism, they were threatened with other punishments. Mona, a WHRD from Kabo factory in Alexandria, went to the police to file a complaint after being dismissed from work in 2013 for organizing a strike. After explaining her case to a group of officers and citing her rights to assembly, association, and peaceful protest, one officer told her: "Forget the revolution. You are lucky to only be fired. We should actually arrest you."

According to HRDs interviewed, in addition to individual labour leaders being fired, collective punishment via mass firing or suspension is increasingly common. In the Alexandria Shipyard case, more than 2,000 workers

were physically prevented from going to their factory jobs following a sit-in in May 2016; approximately 900 still do not have their jobs back more than two years later.

During the Mubarak years, mass firings were highly uncommon and rarely permanent. HRDs were punished in a variety of ways, but workers were rarely, if ever, fired by the dozen as punishment for organising. The independent Egyptian initiative DemoMeter, which tracks popular movements, mobilisations, and punitive measures against protesters, reported that at least 2,691 workers and professionals were dismissed from their jobs between Labour Day 2016 and Labour Day 2017 for "exercising their right to protest."⁵³

CASE STUDY: Kholoud, WHRD and Factory Worker, Alexandria

Kholoud is a labour rights defender, factory worker, and co-founder of the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers, one of the first independently organised workers' movements in Egypt, which provides a range of support programs to labourers across the governorate.

In February 2011, on the second day following Mubarak's resignation from power, approximately 2,000 of Kholoud's factory's 4,000 male and female workers went on strike. Kholoud and other HRDs present that day report that the vast majority of strikers were women. Following the one-day strike, all of the groups' demands were met. Between 2011 and 2013, the state-aligned union representation inside the Kabo factory opposed workers' requests to negotiate for higher salaries, so Kholoud and other activists organised several strikes demanding minimum wage and safer working conditions. Kholoud managed the movement's public campaigning, media contacts, advocacy with local ministries, and led protest chants during sit-ins at the factory and in front of the Ministry of Manpower.

In 2013, weeks after President Morsi was toppled and the military resumed power, police attacked a labour rights protest in Alexandria with birdshot pellets and beat demonstrators. Kholoud was fired along with 10 other activists for leading the action strike, then forced to sign a statement saying the strikers had been injured fighting each other. Company management later offered her the opportunity to resume work if she signed a statement taking responsibility, in advance, for any future strikes that took place at the factory. Kholoud interpreted this as an attempt to coerce her into becoming a critic of worker actions.

53. <https://demometer.blogspot.ie/2017/04/744-2016-2017.html>



Testimony: Nour, WHRD and nurse, Alexandria

Nour is a nurse and labour rights defender with the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers. In 2011 she founded and developed the first independent nurses syndicate in Alexandria and led a negotiation for small salary increases for nurses and day workers at the hospital. From 2011 to 2013 she documented the hospital's failure to implement a decision from the Ministry of Manpower mandating workers be paid unused leave time. Her report led to the implementation of the decision, but the salary negotiations stalled. More than 500 nurses and workers from the hospital went on a successful strike and salaries were increased.

"I've worked in hospitals since 1990, but wasn't an activist until 2011. We saw everyone in the streets and saw it wasn't just for young people, so we all went out. Of course it was scary to organise a new nurses' movement in 2011, security in Egypt is always strict and the ETUF has never been on our side under any regime, but it was nothing like today. When the previous strike we led was successful, every single worker demand was met but then I was fired. **Only me. I was singled out because they knew me from all the other strikes, negotiations, and accompanying workers to court. I was the only one who lost my job.** I'm still trying to help people through the Permanent Conference, but three years later I don't have my job back."



Testimony: Mona, WHRD and factory worker, Alexandria

Mona is a labour rights defender, factory worker in Alexandria, and one of the first members of the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers. In 2011, she independently studied labour rights legislation and ran programs within the Permanent Conference and on factory floors to educate female workers about their rights. She helped organize a 2013 partial strike at Kabo Textile factory from May to July, the final months of Morsi's rule. During the strike, factory management posted an offensive sign on the door "offering" HRDs and workers the opportunity to "beg" for their jobs back. When Morsi was toppled in June 2013, factory management used the economic and security situation of the company to threaten people back to work in Alexandria and across the country. Mona and 10 other leaders of the strike were fired; HRDs say it was clear that management targeted those known for educating other workers about their rights.

"Labour laws are always used against us, but if you know how to read and use them properly, some of the laws are actually helpful. Companies and the government count on the fact that we won't know how to use the law, that we won't know our rights. The harassment started when I started gathering girls to teach them about labour laws."



Testimony: Fatima, WHRD and nurse, Cairo

Fatima is a labour rights defender, public health advocate, and nurse in Cairo. She has worked in both public and private hospitals since 1993 and began leading movements for nurses' rights in 2010. From 2010 to 2016, she was routinely harassed and threatened at her hospital by State Security agents under all four regimes, but reports that violence and retribution has significantly increased since 2016. She was physically assaulted by female police officers when trying to enter a union meeting in 2016, and fired from her job in 2017 after discussing issues in the Egyptian healthcare system on TV in 2017.

"In January 2017 I was invited to speak about healthcare issues on a TV program, and because the situation is so desperate I said yes. I spoke about the shortage of medicines and our problems in the healthcare system. Within a week I was fired. This never, ever happened under Mubarak. I was intimidated and harassed, yes, and they called my dad and threatened him to 'control' me, but I never lost my job for speaking."



54. Workers in Egypt often engage in "partial strikes," in which some workers protest and others work, to actively prevent company management and government officials from claiming that workers seek to harm the factory, damage the national economy, and discourage foreign investment.

VIII. Gendered Attacks

Sexism and a variety of gendered attacks are deployed within and against labour rights movements in Egypt in order to limit the powerful work of women human rights defenders (WHRDs). WHRDs active in labour rights movements report a range of aggressions in which threats and attacks from the state caused gendered divisions within their movements and/or families.

WHRDs report that their fathers and other male relatives receive threatening, sexist phone calls from State Security demanding that they “control” their daughters’ activism. In a number of court cases in which labour rights defenders were on trial for striking, military and civilian prosecutions have worked to divide female and male HRDs, dismantle solidarity, and erode the will of activists to continue in their strike or protest. Several WHRDs report receiving pressure from male colleagues to stop their activism following threats by military and civilian prosecutors that only the men would be imprisoned. WHRDs say such threats reinforce the primacy placed on risks faced more often by men than women (such as long prison sentences or killings), and that their male colleagues frequently disregard the severe, gendered risks faced by WHRDs.

Women labour rights defenders in the nursing, teaching, and textile sectors also reported being pushed out of leadership roles in organisations they helped to found. Male colleagues cite “conservative community attitudes” as excuses to remove WHRDs from leadership positions, speaking opportunities, and outreach missions to rural or remote communities.

“When [male activists] say things to women like ‘you have to stop striking now, they won’t punish you like they punish us,’ they’re only thinking of arrest. They completely disregard what we face. [We have] way less access to lawyers, can be disowned by our families for being too vocal or visible, and in Egypt you’re always at risk of sexual assault. They don’t see any of that.” - WHRD, Cairo

Mona, WHRD and factory worker, Alexandria

WHRD Mona and 10 other strike leaders continued working for an additional three months after being fired from the Kabo factory, as is permitted by law, and slept at the factory overnight in protest against the firings. In late 2013, military officials came to the factory and threatened to arrest the men in the group, unless all 11 – seven men and four women – abandoned their protest. Some of the male activists resigned and pressured the women to do the same, saying the price they would pay would not be comparable.

Nour, WHRD and nurse, Alexandria

In May 2011, WHRD Nour founded the first independent nurses union in Alexandria with the intention of pressuring hospital managers to correctly implement legislation that protected workers. She had previously led a successful documentation and advocacy campaign against management’s failure to pay back unused leave time, as is mandated by law. She led the union’s efforts to acquire hospital approval for the new organisation to operate freely, organized meetings, built advocacy plans, represented the group in negotiations with management, and led outreach and registration of new members. When the union began to establish official leadership positions later that year, male nurses pressured her to be Vice President, rather than President of the organisation, kept her out of public speaking opportunities, and collectively delegated all secretarial tasks to her.



Testimony: Maryam, WHRD and teacher, Cairo

Maryam is a WHRD, teacher, one of the founders of the Egyptian Teachers' Federation after the 2011 revolution, and former Vice President of the Giza Committee of the Federation. From the early 2000s she was a prominent advocate for a range of education-related rights including teachers' wages, corruption in the Egyptian education system, lack of transparency in curriculum design, high pupil-teacher ratios, and the near-compulsory nature of private tuition for both students (due to the lack of sufficient instruction provided by schools) and teachers (due to chronically low salaries requiring them to take on private tuition after-hours to support their families).⁵⁵ She was one of the organisers of a mass teachers' strike in September 2011, the first time Egyptian educators demonstrated on a national scale since 1951, and was critical to the founding of the independent teachers' union after the revolution. As the union began to expand beyond Cairo, from hundreds of members to tens of thousands, she reports that she was forced out of leadership roles by male colleagues.

"In the beginning, in the revolution days and through 2011, everyone seemed happy for me to do the work, to lead. In 2012, [male colleagues] starting saying things like 'we're going to villages tomorrow, to meet more teachers, we'll be sitting in cafés, it's not appropriate for a woman.' Did I just become a woman yesterday? It was clear they didn't want me – an uncovered woman from Cairo who smokes – representing the union to men in areas that they think of as more conservative. When we were small and urban, it was fine for me to do all the work. But when it became a massive national movement, suddenly I'm not a suitable leader. **They offered me a tokenistic role as head of the 'Women's Committee.' That's not for me.**"



55. Interview with an Egyptian Teacher. Teacher Solidarity. 26 November 2012. <https://teachersolidarity.com/blog/interview-with-an-egyptian-teacher>

IX. Weaponizing Poverty

“Whether you’re in prison or free without a job, either way, your family has no money for food.”
- Nagi Rashad, Labour rights defender and grain mill worker, Cairo

Government authorities, the state-aligned ETUF, company managers and boards utilize the effects of poverty to limit the work of labour rights defenders. Tactics include:

- Companies relocate outspoken HRDs to remote factories far from their home towns, increasing the burden of travel costs and pushing their families further into economic hardship as punishment for their activism.
- Threats of mass firing erode solidarity between labour rights defenders and their communities, who fear being unable to afford food and shelter if they join HRD-led movements or stand in solidarity with leading HRDs.
- Knowing that most labourers cannot afford membership dues in two unions, ETUF representatives threaten workers to continue paying their ETUF dues, such that HRD-led unions are often funded by the HRDs alone, even when other workers wish to join.
- Detained labour rights defenders are threatened to resign from their jobs in factories, transportation, and hospitals in exchange for their release.

Financial and class barriers are also used to prevent HRDs from accessing positions of leadership and power. In many sectors, local syndicates aligned with the ETUF require workers to take time off from work to register in person their intention to run for union representative. Further funding is required to run an effective campaign, and many sectors require workers to receive permission from their direct supervisor in order to run. Poverty is an often insurmountable barrier for labourers wanting to represent other labourers as union representatives.



Testimony: Fatima, WHRD and nurse, Cairo

“The current leader of the nurses branch of the national union got the position in a rigged election in 2012. There was a requirement that you get approval from your direct manager to campaign, which is really hard. Our managers don’t want us to make trouble, and women don’t want to jeopardize their jobs by asking. Usually managers don’t think we’re qualified – some say things about lack of education. So it’s basically impossible for vocal activists or poor women who are not connected to the government to run for union leadership. I tried to get permission from my manager in 2012 but she refused to even meet me. There was another election in 2016. After we protested they removed the requirement for managerial permission, but the old leader retained the position because no one else had the money or holiday time to run.”





Testimony: Nagi Rashad, HRD and grain mill worker, Cairo

Nagi Rashad is a labour rights activist and former worker at the South Cairo Grain Mill. For more than twenty years, Rashad has organized for workers rights in Cairo and liaised with HRDs in other provinces to form national solidarity networks. In October 2017, Rashad spoke publicly at the general assembly of the South Cairo Grain Mill about corruption, nepotism in the company's management and the assembly leadership's failure to implement decisions taken by workers in the assembly. As retribution, on 3 December 2017, the company docked five days' salary from his pay check and transferred him to a factory in Masr el-Qadimah, more than an hour from his family home in Waraq. Travel to and from the new factory would cause increased financial hardship for Rashad and his family. On 5 December 2017, he began a hunger strike to protest his relocation and to garner media attention for the situation of workers in the grain mill. Several colleagues then told Nagi they were threatened by company management and State Security agents not to support him, join in the hunger strike, or undertake future strikes. He ended his hunger strike on 31 December 2017.

“There are three big weapons the state uses against us. The biggest is money. They cut off resources for activists' families by firing, suspending, taking your salary, or moving your job to another factory – which is very expensive – as punishment. Many divorces have been caused when already struggling families are pushed further into poverty because a factory wants to punish a labour activist. They also spread many rumours about arrests and military courts – management tells people that military court decisions can't be appealed. They play on people's lack of legal knowledge. And third, they know we don't have money for lawyers to deal with either of these first two risks. Workers end up unrepresented in courts, sometimes military courts, and are offered freedom for resigning from their jobs. But whether you're in prison or free without a job, either way, your family has no money for food.”



CASE STUDY: Aswan Cement “If you follow them, you’ll be fired.”

In July 2017, three workers at the MEDCOM Aswan Cement plant were burned to death as a result of being kept on site during maintenance procedures. HRDs demanding an investigation into the deaths and the company’s safety procedures were detained and put on trial; others were threatened with firing if they took solidarity actions with the detained HRDs.

MEDCOM is an Egyptian construction company headquartered in Cairo that has executed a number of large projects in the country for both domestic and foreign clients. Its website lists projects including at Cairo International Airport, the Egyptian Stock Exchange, and all major electromechanical and infrastructure works for the Economic Mission building at the French Embassy in Cairo.⁵⁶

On 23 July 2017, a substance, heated to approximately 1,200 degrees Celsius, spilled into a worker area killing three and injuring others. Workers reported they had to remove their colleagues’ charred bodies from the shop floor. Company negligence – and refusal to stop production during maintenance – caused the gruesome deaths, according to HRDs and strike leaders. One striker told Egyptian media outlet Mada Masr “had safety measures been properly implemented, workers would not have been on duty during maintenance.”⁵⁷

Workers went on strike demanding an investigation into the deaths and company safety procedures. Soon after, police raided the workers’ dorms and arrested 25 alleged strikers. Other workers tried to follow them to the station in solidarity and for protection; Egyptian HRDs have long reported that such accompaniment can significantly decrease the risk of torture or mistreatment in detention, if security knows other activists are monitoring the case. **Security threatened that anyone leaving the company compound’s premises would be immediately fired, leaving labourers seeking to document and stand in solidarity with their colleagues left to choose between “feeding their children and protecting their colleagues,” according to one HRD interviewed.**

Security later released 17 people, but eight workers remained on trial for nearly one year on charges of obstructing means of production, inciting a strike, using violence and threatening public employees.

In August 2017, MEDCOM Aswan Cement responded to the allegations of neglect and an inquiry from the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. It claimed the deaths were due to the dangerous nature of cement work in general, and that the eight workers detained in connection with the deaths were released without charge.⁵⁸ In fact, charges were not dropped against all workers until June 2018.⁵⁸

56. <http://www.medcomegypt.com/pb7.html>. Accessed 11 April 2018.

57. <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2017/07/29/news/u/engineer-dies-after-sustaining-injuries-at-aswan-cement-plant-bringing-death-toll-to-3/>

58. MEDCOM response to inquiry from the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, 16 August 2017. <https://tinyurl.com/y9ea3tqw>

X. Assembly & Association

Space for freedom of assembly and association has all but disappeared in Egypt. In addition to the aggressive legal restrictions outlawing independent unions (Section III), HRDs report a range of violations of their rights to freedom of assembly and association including being physically prevented from entering union meetings, intimidation from State Security preventing them from meeting with labourers to document violations, feeling forced to meet secretly in unsafe locations, and reprisals against workers who contact HRDs for support.

a. Exclusion from Union Meetings

HRDs report being threatened not to attend or have been physically prevented from entering meetings of government-sanctioned unions, in a clear attempt to keep rights-based activism and discussion away from the officially recognized syndicates.

“In 2016, security physically prevented me from entering the general assembly of the national union. I was there to hand out papers on workers’ rights legislation and to discuss the [Sisi] regime’s labour policies. They saw me approaching and grabbed me. I tried to push through – I’m a dues paying member. I have the right to attend the gathering and speak. The officers put me into a police truck and took me to the station. They let me go but threatened me not to attend the next general assembly. If I can’t speak to nurses at work, I can’t organise an independent conference, and I’m attacked for trying to speak with the state-aligned union, what can I do?” - Fatima, WHRD and nurse, Cairo

“Under Mubarak, SCAF, and especially Morsi, I was very active. Yes there was harassment, but I could travel everywhere [to different hospitals] and speak with people freely. I can no longer go hospital to hospital to meet nurses because security is so aggressive. We have to use Facebook to connect, and to document abuses because we can’t meet face to face.”

- WHRD and nurse, Cairo

b. Physical meeting space

Labour rights defenders report that it is near impossible to access safe and consistent meeting space to gather with colleagues, due to: the government’s ongoing refusal to approve the registration of independent unions and labour rights organisations; widespread fear over the ongoing mass arrests of workers; inability to financially afford secure meeting space. As a result, larger human rights organisations and political parties supportive of worker movements have offered their headquarters and offices for labour rights groups to meet in.

However, because nearly all gatherings are under threat in Egypt, meeting in the office of a political party or human rights organisation puts labour rights groups at risk of being arrested for an alleged affiliation with these groups. In Alexandria, labour rights activists were arrested when the political party hosting them in a back room had a protest outside at the same time. In Cairo, dozens of raids on HRD offices in Cairo in 2016 led rights groups to cease hosting trade union meetings for fear they would endanger the workers. In March 2018, security forces attempted to shut down a labour rights conference at the ECESR offices in Cairo for transportation workers, threatening the lawyers and then setting up check points to ID each attendee.

c. Access to Document Violations

The majority of HRDs Front Line Defenders spoke to report drastically reduced abilities to interview employees of factories, hospitals, schools, and public transportation centres due to the risk of arrest and military prosecution. This affects HRDs who are themselves employed in these places and those who work as researchers for economic, social and cultural rights organisations.

In Cairo, WHRD nurses are now unable to visit hospitals to speak with nurses about salaries, discrimination and ill-treatment, and have

shifted their organizing online This brings further risk as they report vague knowledge about the digital security issues inherent to organizing on Facebook, but no experience with mitigating these risks. In Alexandria, WHRDs volunteering with the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers are unable to access shop floors after being fired for peacefully organizing workers. WHRDs with expertise in education rights working at human rights organisations in Cairo have drastically cut back on research missions to interview teachers as a result of the ongoing arrest and military prosecution of HRDs.



Testimony: Kholoud, Factory, Alexandria

HRD leaders of the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers report severe security issues related to the lack of safe meeting space in Alexandria. In the first years of the Conference's founding, workers attempted to pool their own money to raise funds for a meeting space, but because workers are compelled to pay dues to the official state-aligned union, very few labourers in Alexandria can afford additional payments. No government since 2011 has approved the organisation's registration, and due to the extreme crackdown under the Sisi regime, no space in the city is safe for activists and workers to gather to discuss labour rights without fear of raid, arrest, or punishment at work. During the Ramadan holiday in 2017, the el-Karama political party offered labour rights defenders from the Permanent Conference a small room at their headquarters to meet during the party's protest against the government's decision to sell the Tahrir and Sanafir Islands to Saudi Arabia. Though unaffiliated with el-Karama, and not typically holding meetings during the holiday, the HRDs accepted the offer because they had been unable to meet with workers any place else in almost a year. Police raided the Tahrir and Sanafir protest, held outside the headquarters, and arrested four workers from the APCW gathering inside the building.

"It's almost worse than being forced underground. We refuse to quit, but by 2015 it was no longer safe for us to meet anywhere – factories, cafés, even our homes. The remaining options for meeting space are incredibly dangerous. We would never ordinarily have met in a political party's headquarters, but we were desperate to meet with workers. In Sisi's Egypt, any gathering of more than a few people draws State Security attention, so the idea was that the protest outside would give some sort of cover for workers coming and going to our meeting inside. But police attacked the land rights protest outside and four of our workers were taken with them. Coupled with the ongoing retribution in factories against workers who seek our help, following the arrests workers now view us as even more dangerous than they did before."



"It's harder than ever to defend workers and trade unionists because the government is trying to make them fear us. Many of my clients have been threatened to change their lawyers, and they end up being represented by people without labour law experience. Authorities 'remind' workers of what happened to me, and then the workers think, if this lawyer with international contacts and support can be detained and tortured, of course we would be, too. It's beyond just arrested and beating us, they're making it dangerous for workers to contact us." - Malek Adly, HRD and lawyer

d. Intimidation & Reprisals for Contacting HRDs

State security visit factories and hospitals while HRDs are on shift to harass and intimidate them; HRDs say this frightens their colleagues by painting an image of them as dangerous people. Security officials also visit hospitals and factories on days HRDs do not work, to interrogate colleagues and warn them against associating with HRDs. One HRD from a Mahalla factory reported that factory security would stand by his work station for hours during a shift to intimidate him and ensure other workers did not speak to him. A WHRD and nurse from Cairo reported that State Security come to her hospital, “watch me clock-in, stay for my whole

shift, and watch me leave.”

Workers in Cairo, Alexandria, Aswan, and Mahalla have been threatened not to seek support from lawyers, advocacy groups, and other HRDs. In Cairo, labour lawyer Malek Adly reports that his clients, many of them HRDs and strike leaders, are routinely threatened by their employers and security forces to change to a lawyer with no labour law experience. In Alexandria, WHRDs with the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers have received reports from the Kabo Factory that several workers have been threatened with firing if they contact the Permanent Conference.



Testimony: WHRD, Cairo

A Cairo-based WHRD researching economic, social, and cultural rights with a focus on education is now unable to visit schools for a range of research projects for fear of being arrested and tried in a military court.

“To access an educational space to document both labour conditions of the teachers and the educational rights of the students, it’s logical to take permission from the Ministry of Education and the school district. But now, we would need permission from State Security to speak with a teacher. If I am caught interviewing teachers, I could be considered in violation of the Presidential decree, they could consider the school under control of the military because it is a public institution. I could end up in military court for interviewing a nursery school teacher about her work schedule.”



CASE STUDY: Kabo Factory, Alexandria

After being fired from the Kabo factory, WHRD Mona continued to document labour rights violations inside the factory based on reports gathered from colleagues. Workers continued to call her for help filing cases against the company, especially those related to arbitrary dismissal from work and withheld bonuses. According to reports she received, more than 1,500 people from her factory have been dismissed without cause since 2013. Mona helps to connect them with affordable or free legal representation and to document their case in accordance with labour laws. Workers inside the factory report that Kabo workers who contact HRDs and the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers for support experience significantly more threats, salary cuts, and even firings than those who do not seek assistance following a violation of their rights. Mona reports that since 2013, she has learned of 10 Kabo workers who were fired or suspended from work simply for contacting her for support. A separate company in Alexandria fired a group of workers who went to HRDs from the Permanent Conference for legal and media support in 2014.⁵⁹ When management dismissed them, the workers were reportedly told, “Let your Permanent Conference help you now.”

59. Based on interviews with three members of the Alexandria Permanent Conference of Workers, Alexandria.

XI. Recommendations

Front Line Defenders calls on the Egyptian government to:

- Immediately drop all charges against labour rights defenders, trade unionists and workers in all sectors who have been targetted as a result of their peaceful activism, organising, and leadership in the struggle for labour rights;
- End the practice of trying civilian workers and labour rights defenders before military courts or other exceptional courts established under the state of emergency;
- Cease targetting trade unionists and labour rights defenders including women labour rights defenders in all circumstances, so that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment;
- Create an enabling environment for free and independent trade unions to represent the genuine interest of their members by revoking Law 213 of 2017, which contradicts Article 676 of the 2014 Constitution guaranteeing the right of workers to establish syndicates and unions;
- Respect the right of workers to strike, including workers in companies and work sites owned or operated by the Ministry of Defense, and ensure the implementation of the legal obligations enshrined in the core ILO conventions, notably 87 and 98, by reforming all provisions in the Penal Code and Labour Law which restrict the right to strike;
- Remove threshold requirements for forming trade unions and ensure that workers and their representatives manage their unions independently;
- Amend Law no. 107 of 2013 to end arbitrary and unnecessary restriction on the Right to Public Meetings, Processions and Peaceful Demonstrations and revoke Law no. 10 of 1914 which criminalises and imposes harsh penalties on assemblies of five or more people if authorities consider the gathering a threat to public peace;
- Cease harassment and intimidation of lawyers who provide pro bono legal aid to workers and labour rights defenders;
- Remove restrictions to the freedom of movement of human rights defenders, including travel bans;
- Replace the NGOs law no. 70 of 2017 with a law which ensures the right to freedom of association and protects the independence of NGOs.

For the French government:

- Mainstream the protection of human rights defenders, including labour rights defenders in the bilateral economic, security and military cooperation between France and Egypt, fully adopting and implementing the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders;
- Ensure that démarches are carried out towards the Egyptian authorities asking for the freeing of all imprisoned HRDs and the immediate dropping of all charges against them;
- In coordination with EU Member States, and in consultation with HRDs, ensure French embassy staff are available to observe trials of HRDs, including trials in military and state security courts, and particularly those of labour rights defenders connected to projects with French companies, and issue public statements regarding whether or not the trials meet international standards;
- Investigate Naval Group's adherence to its obligations under the French Duty of Vigilance Law to identify and prevent human rights violations by its staff, partners and contractors in Alexandria;
- In coordination with HRDs, carry out visits at the Alexandria Shipyard to hold meetings with labour rights defenders on site, and ensure that future French visits to military-owned and -operated businesses include meetings with labour rights defenders;
- Conduct a full review of all French companies operating in Egypt or maintaining contracts with Egyptian companies to ensure compliance with French and EU legal provisions for labourers and labour conditions;
- Ensure compliance with the UN Guiding Principles vis-à-vis the responsibility of French companies to uphold human rights standards abroad.

For Naval Group:

- Immediately insist that its partner, the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, halt the ongoing military trial of workers and labour rights defenders who are charged for their work defending labour rights in projects supervised by Naval Group's staff and contractors in Alexandria;
- Publicly state that there will be a re-evaluation of the relationship between Naval Group and the Egyptian Ministry of Defense if the military trial and targeting of HRDs continue;
- Immediately carry out human rights due diligence in relation to all deals and collaboration with the Egyptian Ministry of Defense;
- Ensure that business collaboration between Naval Group and the Egyptian Ministry of Defense, its holding companies, subsidiaries, and factories respects human rights and labour standards;
- Conduct a thorough and transparent internal investigation into the abuses committed against Egyptian labour rights defenders and workers in projects contracted by Naval Group and its partners in Alexandria, including determination if Naval Group staff or contractors in Egypt were not complicit in human rights abuses, and publicise the findings of this investigation;
- Commit to applying the highest norms of business and human rights and corporate social responsibility, as per Naval Group's public commitments to the UN Global Compact, ILO standards, and its own code of conduct;
- Develop and publish a human rights policy statement, making explicit reference to the critical role of HRDs;
- Write human rights commitments into future contracts, ensuring that freedoms of assembly and association are respected on Naval Group project sites, and develop clear reporting guidelines for Naval Group staff and contractors who witness violations of human rights;
- Ensure that Naval Group's whistleblowing procedure is available in languages relevant to workers on major Naval Group projects abroad, and widely known to those workers;
- Actively engage with HRDs and trade unionists connected to projects managed by Naval Group, including via meetings, briefings, and sponsoring legal counsel to observe trials;

For the European Union and Member States:

- Condition EU budget support, other forms of aid and political dialogue to the elimination of military trials of civilians and of torture;
- Establish a formal monitoring mechanism at the EU Delegation in Cairo to ensure the cessation of the persecution of labour rights defenders and the reform of laws that obstruct the work of HRDs and WHRDs;
- Adopt due diligence requirements for investors within the framework of the EU's upcoming Sustainable Finance Package, as well as disclosure and reporting requirements for investors for ESG and human rights impact assessments;
- Raise the protection of labour rights defenders in the EU-Egypt Association Council and Sub Committee on Political Matters, Human Rights and Democracy, and establish a formal reporting mechanism and standards that have to be met by the Egyptian government;
- Ensure that the EU's financial support to Egyptian government under the Revised European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is not provided to public or private corporations which repress workers or labour rights defenders, by establishing a formal reporting and review mechanism;
- Review all interactions between the EU and the Egyptian authorities and Egyptian economic actors to ensure compliance with international human rights standards, and carry out a 'no-harm' analysis before and during such interactions;
- Establish an inclusive regular consultation between the EU Delegation in Cairo and Egyptian labour rights defenders and trade unionists, including ahead of and after bilateral meetings between the EU and Egyptian government;
- Fully implement the EU HRD Guidelines, in consultation with HRDs, including: ask the authorities to have access to and visit labour rights defenders who currently face the military trial; monitor and observe their trials and denounce the absence of due process and the abusive use of anti terrorism and security legislation to silence defenders; engage in dialogue with the Egyptian authorities and with Naval Group to mediate a solution that is fully human rights compliant;
- Observe HRDs' trials, including military trials, in close consultation with HRDs or, where that is not possible, in consultation with their closest colleagues, lawyers and family;
- Regularly release public statements on cases of labour rights defenders, raising in particular the cases of women labour rights defenders and those from marginalised communities.

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DUBLIN

Front Line Defenders - Head Office
Second Floor, Grattan House
Temple Road, Blackrock, A94 FA39
Co. Dublin, Ireland

Tel: 00 353 1 212 37 50
Fax: 00 353 1 212 10 01
Email: info@frontlinedefenders.org

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Tel: 00 32 230 93 83
Fax: 00 32 230 00 28
Email: euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org

WWW.FRONTLINEDEFENDERS.ORG



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