



ASSOCIATION
FOR MIDDLE EAST WOMEN'S
STUDIES

To Whom It May Concern:

We write on behalf of the Association of Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS), which is an organization of scholars and individuals with an interest in women and gender studies in the context of the Middle East/ North Africa and beyond, including transnational and diasporic communities in Europe as well as North and South America. AMEWS is affiliated with the Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc. and works with academic networks around the world. Membership in AMEWS is open to anyone with an interest in Middle East/Muslim women and gender studies.

We are writing to express our grave concern with regards to the Egyptian government's recent crackdown on the human rights movement in Egypt. We are particularly concerned at the recent reopening of the 2011 'NGO Foreign Funding case', in which the public prosecutor is investigating a number of Egyptian human rights NGOs for receiving foreign funding. We note that when this case was initially opened in 2011, only workers in foreign organizations were prosecuted and later found guilty (in June 2013). At the time, no Egyptian human rights organizations or their employees were prosecuted. However, the Egyptian authorities are stepping up their crackdown on civil society and human rights organizations.

According to media reports, the individuals under recent investigation include Hossam Bahgat, founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Human Rights, Gamal Eid, executive director of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information, and Mozn Hassan, director of Nazra for Feminist Studies. We note that all three of these organizations have played a prominent role in advocating against human rights abuses in Egypt.

In particular, we are troubled by the investigation of Nazra for Feminist Studies, which has been at the forefront of the struggle against gender-based and sexual violence in Egypt. The work of Nazra and its director Mozn Hassan has been recognized internationally, with Ms. Hassan receiving the Charlotte Bunch Women's Human Rights Defender Award in 2013. Nazra For Feminist Studies received international recognition by being awarded the UN Economic and Social Council Special Consultative Status in 2014.

On March 20th, Nazra for Feminist Studies confirmed it has been summoned as part of an official interrogation by the Egyptian government targeting civil society organizations. The leading women's group confirmed that they have been included in an official interrogation in case 173, known as the "cases of foreign funding for civil organizations in Egypt", and that three staff members received official summons for questioning as well. Little information was given to the staff members about the reason behind the summon and its relationship to Nazra. This latest development comes in wake of months of dreaded anticipation, as Nazra and its founder Mozn Hassan constantly felt under threat. Finally, on Tuesday, March the 22nd, Nazra announced officially on its website that Mozn Hassan the founder and director of Nazra, was included as a defendant in the case 173 year 2011, known in the media as "The NGOs' Foreign Funding" case. The nature of the charges that Ms. Hassan is facing remains unknown at the time of writing this statement.

The summons and charges against Mozn Hassan came at the end of the interrogation that took place on Tuesday, 22 March, with three staff members at Nazra. The three interrogation sessions included various issues concerning Nazra and the nature of their role in it, during which Mozn Hassan was referred to as a defendant.

For many of us studying women's rights in Egypt, the important role of Nazra for Feminist Studies in defending women's rights in Egypt, especially over the past five years since the uprising of 2011, cannot be highlighted enough. Nazra had been at the forefront of the battle against gender-based violence in Egypt and had provided legal and logistical support for tens of young feminist groups, and hundreds of survivors of gender-based violence. In addition, Nazra for Feminist Studies represents an unparalleled hub for feminist activities in Egypt. Its closure will constitute a terrible blow to the mobilization efforts around women's rights in Egypt for a long time to come. We also have reasons to fear for Mozn's safety, and we call upon the international community and the global academic community to exert pressure on the Egyptian state to respect its international obligations, and ensure the full legal rights of Mozn as she faces a trial that she knows little about.

According to UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is a signatory, everyone has the right to free association and no restrictions may be placed on this right except those 'which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.'

We fear that the reopening of this case, several years following initial investigations, may be part of a wider campaign of intimidation and repression against independent voices in Egypt. The reopening of the case certainly has a chilling effect on all those working for the sake of human rights in Egypt. Therefore, we call on the Egyptian authorities to guarantee all civil society organizations, as well as the media, cultural figures and academic researchers freedom of expression and association in line with the Egyptian constitution of 2014. We thus call on the Egyptian government to immediately revoke these arbitrary measures and drop all charges against Nazra and its staff members;

Finally, we call upon the academic community at large, and those studying the Middle East, in particular, to add their signatures to this letter and to share this statement as widely as possible.

In solidarity,

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cc:

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