Thursday 24 November 2022

P9_TA(2022)0426

Human rights situation in Egypt

European Parliament resolution of 24 November 2022 on the human rights situation in Egypt (2022/2962(RSP))

(2023/C 167/15)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Egypt,

— having regard to the statements by the European External Action Service Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Egypt,

— having regard to the EU Neighbourhood Policy and to the joint communication of 9 February 2021 entitled 'Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood — A new Agenda for the Mediterranean' (JOIN(2021)0002),

— having regard to the 13th Inter-parliamentary meeting EU-Egypt held on 29 September 2022,

— having regard to the memorandum of understanding between the EU, Egypt and Israel on cooperation related to trade, transport and export of natural gas to the European Union, signed in Cairo on 15 June 2022,

— having regard to the latest statement by the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Egypt,

— having regard to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of Egypt for 2019-2020,

— having regard to the statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of 8 November 2022 calling for the immediate release of Alaa Abdel Fattah,

— having regard to the EU Guidelines on the death penalty, on torture, on freedom of expression, on human rights defenders, on violence against women and girls and on the rights of LGBTI persons,

— having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989,

— having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Arab Charter on Human Rights, all of which have been ratified by Egypt,

— having regard to the Constitution of Egypt, notably its Article 52 on the prohibition of all forms of torture, Article 73 on freedom of assembly and Article 93 on the binding character of international human rights law,

— having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,

— having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas Egypt hosted the 27th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in Sharm El -Sheikh; whereas this international event put the spotlight on Egypt's domestic repression against peaceful and legitimate voices of civil society;

B. whereas in 2021 Egypt launched its national human rights strategy and its national dialogue, which officially aimed to improve its human rights record and establish a more inclusive political environment; whereas in April 2022, the Egyptian Presidential Pardon Committee was launched, which is tasked with conducting civil society organisation investigations into cases of prisoners whose situation does not comply with international human rights standards; whereas the committee has overlooked grave past and ongoing human rights violations and there have been no substantial changes one year after the launch of the national human rights strategy and Egypt's national dialogue; whereas the Subcommittee on Political Matters, Human Rights and Democracy — International and Regional Issues, emanating from the Association Agreement between Egypt and the European Union, serves as a framework for discussing human rights issues between the two parties; whereas the next meeting of this subcommittee is scheduled for 8 December 2022 in Cairo;

C. whereas Egypt did not amend any relevant piece of legislation ahead of its hosting of COP27, including as regards the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association and media freedom, even though providing space to civil society is a joint commitment enshrined in the EU-Egypt partnership priorities and stipulated in the Egyptian Constitution; whereas the state of emergency, in force since 2017, has not been lifted; whereas mass trials and mass detention continue, with military and state security emergency courts trying tens of thousands of civilians; whereas on 8 July 2021 the UN's Special Rapporteurs on the rights to freedom of assembly and association, on human rights defenders and on the protection of human rights while countering terrorism jointly expressed their concerns over Egypt's 2019 Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Law, its 2018 Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law, the 2015 Terrorist Entities Law and the 2013 Law on Public Meetings and Peaceful Demonstrations; whereas according to the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, the Egyptian Government detained nearly 734 individuals across 18 governorates between 1 October and 14 November 2022;

D. whereas in November 2022 human rights defender Alaa Abdel Fattah, who has been arbitrarily detained for most of the past decade on unsubstantiated charges, interrupted his hunger strike, which he had started in April 2022, after being force-fed following a near-death experience in his prison cell; whereas since the beginning of COP27 he had also stopped drinking water; whereas Alaa still has had no consular access to UK officials and whereas his lawyer was denied a visit; whereas Alaa's family has been sporadically allowed to visit him in the past following international pressure;

E. whereas the Egyptian Government has excluded independent human rights groups from participating at COP27 through a covert government-controlled registration process that filtered out groups critical of the Egyptian Government, undue restrictions to freedom of peaceful assembly outside the COP27 venue and unjustified delays in the issuing of visas to those travelling from abroad; whereas only some independent human rights groups and rights defender Sanaa Seif were able to participate thanks to the assistance of international organisations;

F. whereas women rights defenders, LGBTIQ+ people and Coptic rights defenders are still being harassed, intimidated, arrested and detained, such as in the case of Patrick George Zaki, who is still under a travel ban and is still facing trial before a state emergency court after criticising his government's policy towards Coptic Christians, and in that of women social media influencers Haneen Hossam and Mawada Al Adham, who were sentenced to three and two years in prison on trumped up morality charges in 2020 after casually dancing in TikTok videos;

G. whereas the ninth meeting of the Association Council of the EU and Egypt held on 20 June 2022 and the 2021-2027 partnership priorities adopted on 19 June 2022 reiterated the commitment of both parties to promote democracy, fundamental freedoms and human rights, gender equality and equal opportunities;

H. whereas Egypt is a long-standing strategic partner of the EU, with shared goals of building stability, peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean and Middle East regions and whereas it plays an important role for stability in the region; whereas

Thursday 24 November 2022

the EU is Egypt's largest economic partner and its main source of foreign investment; whereas in June 2022, the EU and Egypt adopted partnership priorities in many areas, including security, counter-terrorism and judiciary reform; whereas Egypt supported the UN resolution condemning Russia's annexation of Ukrainian regions and continues to support EU and international efforts to end the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine; whereas Egypt has signed a memorandum of understanding between it, the EU and Israel to reduce gas imports from Russia following its aggression against Ukraine; whereas the Commission has allocated 100 EUR million to Egypt from the Food and Resilience Facility to help it deal with food shortages resulting from the war of aggression against Ukraine;

1. Deeply deplores the continued lack of basic political rights and freedoms in Egypt, including in the context of the holding of COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh; regrets that COP27 did not lead to an improvement in the human rights situation;

2. Condemns in the strongest terms the Egyptian authorities' censorship, harassment and intimidation of representatives of Egypt's civil society, which has taken place even on international UN premises, as well as the new wave of arrests and detentions in the context of COP27; conveys its support to the Government of Germany, which lodged a complaint on 13 November 2022 against the Egyptian authorities over the excessive security surveillance of participants in the German pavilion of COP27; deplores that independent Egyptian NGOs were refused a one-time registration to COP27 and that only a handful managed to attend, and only thanks to the fact that international organisations gave them their own badges; deplores the selection by the Egyptian authorities of civil society organisations that do not criticise the authorities; underlines that, as legitimate stakeholders, local communities and NGOs from Sinai should have been allowed to take part in COP27, as it was taking place in Sinai; deplores Egypt's secret process using undisclosed selection criteria to exclude critical human rights NGOs; urges the Egyptian authorities not to take any retaliatory measures against those Egyptian human rights defenders and activists who publicly voiced concerns over Egypt's human rights violations during COP27;

3. Firmly condemns the continued arbitrary and pre-trial detention of tens of thousands of prisoners of conscience in Egypt, many of whom are detained in inhuman conditions without access to a fair trial or basic rights, as evidenced in Egypt's political prisons at Wadi Natroun and Badr; notes that a limited fraction of Egypt's political prisoners were released or pardoned by the Presidential Pardon Committee in April 2022, with the release of between 800 and 1 000 prisoners from arbitrary pre-trial detention; highlights that at least 1 953 Egyptians have been arbitrarily arrested and detained since then, according to Egyptian NGOs and Amnesty International;

4. Urges the Egyptian authorities to immediately release Mohamed 'Oxygen' Ibrahim, Mohamed Adel, Alaa Abdel Fattah and the three lawyers that are the 2020 recipients of the human rights award of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe, Ibrahim Metwally Hegazy, Mohamed El Baqer and Hoda Abdelmoniem, as well as Ezzat Ghoneim, Ahmed Amasha, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, Mohamed El Kassas, Ziad Abu El Fadl, Aisha El Shater, Mohamed Abo Houraira, Manal Agrama, Marwa Arafa, Hala Fahmy, Safaa El Korbagy, Tawfik Ghanim, Seif Thabit, Safwan Thabit, Sherif al Rouby, Anas El-Beltagy, Ahmed Douma, Mohamed Adel Fahmy, Nermin Hussein, Haneen Hossam, Mawadda el-Adham, Ismail Iskandarani, Seif Fateen, Hisham Genena, Omar Mohammed Ali, Aymen Moussa, Omar el Hout, Ahmed Moussa Abd El Khaleq and Ahmed Fayez, among many others unjustly detained; stresses that those women and men are Egyptian human rights defenders, journalists, peaceful activists, politicians, women social media influencers or businessmen who refused to sell their assets to the military; calls on the Egyptian authorities to lift the travel bans on Patrick George Zaki and Mahinour Al Masry;

5. Urges the Egyptian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release British-Egyptian human rights defender and peaceful activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, Deutsche Welle and Reporters Without Borders award recipient, who has been arbitrarily detained for most of the past decade on unsubstantiated charges, for his peaceful and legitimate calls for more rights and freedoms and who is far from being an isolated case, and to allow him to promptly depart for the UK; highlights that both Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz and France's President Emmanuel Macron have called for his release;

6. Reiterates its utmost condemnation of the widespread use of torture by Egypt's security apparatus; recalls that Egypt's 25 January 2011 revolution started as a public outcry against police impunity following the torture and killing of blogger Khaled Said, among others; urges Egypt to fully cooperate with the Italian authorities' investigation into the murder of

Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni, who was tortured to death by security officials in 2016; reiterates, in particular, its call to notify General Tariq Sabir, Colonel Athar Kamel Mohamed Ibrahim, Colonel Uhsam Helmi and Major Magdi Ibrahim Abdelal Sharif of the judicial proceeding against them in Italy; condemns in the strongest terms the torture to death of economist Ayman Hadhoud, who died on 5 March 2022 after being forcibly disappeared and detained by security officials following his criticism of economic policies, and deeply deplores the lack of any independent autopsy and a credible investigation by Egypt's Public Prosecution;

7. Urges Egypt to release all 21 journalists who are currently in prison for doing their job, as documented by Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists; underlines the right of all Egyptians to access information without their government's censorship; notes the decision, taken under pressure at the start of the COP27 conference, to allow access to some websites of human rights NGOs and independent newspapers such as Medium, Mada Masr or Human Rights Watch; stresses, however, that such websites should always remain accessible to Egyptians even after the conference;

8. Urges the Egyptian authorities therefore to release all journalists who were detained as of November 2022: Khaled Abdelwahab Radwan, Ahmed Fayez, Alaa Abdelfattah, Ismail Alexandrani, Mohamed Ibrahim (aka Mohamed Oxygen), Ahmed Allaam, Hamdi al-Zaeem, Tawfik Ghanem, Rabie al-Sheikh, Adallah Shusha, Khaled Sahloob, Bahaa al-Din Ibrahim Nemat Allah, Hisham Abdel Aziz, Mohamed Said Fahmy, Badr Mohamed Badr, Raouf Ebeid, Mostafa Saad, Mohamed Mostafa Moussa, Mahmoud Saad Diab and Amr Shnin;

9. Calls on the Egyptian authorities to put a stop to discrimination and guarantee effective equality for all Egyptians before the law and in practice, as stipulated in the constitution, regardless of their faith or belief; points to the long-standing discrimination against minorities, such as the Coptic minority and the people of the Bahá'í faith; calls on Egypt to review its blasphemy laws to ensure protection of freedom of conscience and the rights of religious minorities;

10. Urges Egypt to respect basic international standards on freedom of association and to repeal its repressive NGO Law 149/2019, which subordinates all activities to government control; shares the concerns expressed by UN human rights experts on Egypt's legal arsenal to curtail freedom of association, of expression, of the press and the right to peaceful assembly under the pretext of fighting terrorism; urges Egypt to also amend or repeal its 2018 Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law, its 2015 Terrorist Entities Law and the 2013 Law on Public Meetings and Peaceful Demonstrations; calls on the Egyptian authorities once again to close case 173/2011, known as 'the Foreign funding case', and lift all travel bans and assets freezes against 31 employees of human rights NGOs;

11. Calls on the Egyptian Parliament to accelerate its adoption of a comprehensive law on violence against women, particularly honour killings; calls on the Egyptian authorities to reiterate their opposition to female genital mutilation and effectively prosecute those who continue to practice it; recommends that the Egyptian authorities reinforce their cooperation with the EU in finding new ways to further protect women against sexual abuse and gender-based violence; condemns in the strongest possible terms gender-based murders;

12. Calls on the Egyptian authorities to end arrests and prosecutions for adult consensual sexual relations, including same-sex relations or relations based on gender expression, and to immediately release LGBTIQ+ people who remain arbitrarily detained, often in inhuman conditions;

13. Welcomes the recent legal changes that Egypt has made on child labour and child marriage; calls, however, on the Egyptian authorities to further strengthen the implementation of the law on child marriage and to reinforce school systems, and public child protection services preventing and responding to child abuse to further protect children against it;

14. Urges Egypt to abolish the death penalty, and declare an immediate moratorium on its application; deplores Egypt's rise over the past decade as one of the world's worst offenders on capital punishment, including for juvenile offenders;

15. Reiterates its call to all EU Member States and the EU delegation to attend the trials of Egyptian and foreign human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists and to visit them in detention;

16. Urges the EU Member States to support a monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave human rights violations in Egypt at the UN Human Rights Council; recalls that the EU should mainstream human rights concerns in all its high-level exchanges with Egyptian officials, including the EU-Egypt Association Council; calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service to stress the interconnectedness between democratic development and growth; calls on the UN to establish criteria for host countries on access for civil society and freedom of expression at future COP meetings and similar UN conferences;

17. Reiterates its call for a profound and comprehensive review of the EU's relations with Egypt in light of the very limited progress on Egypt's human rights record and of its crackdown on dissent, despite continuing support from European partners; urges the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to take a firm public position on the need for Egypt to release political prisoners, make concrete human rights progress, end and investigate torture and abandon the massive use of abusive pre-trial detention and travel bans to clamp down on real or perceived dissent as necessary conditions to improve the EU's relations and cooperation with Egypt; reiterates its call on the EU Member States to consider adopting targeted sanctions against those most responsible for the brutal repression in the country; calls for more transparency on all forms of financial support or training provided to Egypt by the EU, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank;

18. Urges all EU Member States to fully abide by the EU Council conclusions of 21 August 2013 announcing the suspension of export licences for any equipment used for internal repression, including surveillance technology used to track down dissenting voices;

19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt.