

# “They are not welcome”

Report on the Uyghur crisis in Egypt



# They are not welcome

## Report on the Uyghur crisis in Egypt

Prepared By:

Mohamed Mostafa

Researcher, Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF)

Mohamed Nagi

Researcher, Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE)

Edited By:

Mohamed Nagi

Publisher:

Association of Freedom of  
Thought and Expression

info@afteegypt.org

www.afteegypt.org

Publisher:

Egyptian Commission for  
Rights and Freedoms

info@rights-freedoms.org

www.ec-rf.org

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مؤسسة حرية الفكر والتعبير  
Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression

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# Contant

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## Report methodology

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In the preparation of this report, the two institutions relied on 9 interviews with members of the Uyghur, conducted by researchers from July 6, 2017 to August 17, 2017. The interviewees ranged from residents in Egypt to others who had managed to leave. Some of them were students in Al-Azhar, others had finished their education, as well as a relative of a student who was forcibly disappeared in Egypt. The two institutions also interviewed lawyers of the detained Uyghur students in addition to two interviews with Azhar students of non-Chinese nationalities to study the impact of what happened to the Uyghur students on them.

The two institutions continued to monitor the situation with sources they had documented with throughout the reporting period. The researchers also attempted to track and read part of the history of the Egyptian government in the forced deportation of refugees (e.g. Eritreans), based on an interview conducted by a researcher with a former Amnesty International official who worked on this file.

In analyzing the legal status of **Uyghur** students detained in Egypt, we relied on international covenants and treaties ratified by the Egyptian government as well as the Egyptian constitution and relevant laws.

Since the beginning of the crisis last July, the two institutions have sought to understand the reasons for this security attack and document testimonies from several sources, despite security persecutions of Uyghur students and their families inside Egypt. The two institutions worked to verify these testimonies from more than one source.

In order to protect the safety of sources involved in the report from security harassments likely to occur to them, their identity was concealed under pseudonyms upon their request.

## Introduction

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In early July, Egyptian security forces arrested dozens of Uyghur individuals inside Egypt, most of them Azhar students. Initial estimates published by some media channels<sup>1</sup> indicate that 70 of the Uyghur were arrested from Nasr City and 20 were arrested at Borg El Arab airport in Alexandria.

The security campaign against the Uyghur began on July 3, 2017, by raiding a restaurant owned by a member of the Uyghur sect in the seventh district of Nasr City. According to the testimonies obtained by the two institutions, the number of Uyghur arrested since the beginning of July is between 90 and 120 individuals. Most of the arrests took place in the seventh district of Nasr City from restaurants, shops and houses (at least 70 people), in addition to a number arrested at the airports of Burj Al Arab, Hurghada, Cairo and the sea port of Nuweiba or from the roads leading to those ports.

There were reports that 12 Uyghurs had been deported to China, but we could not confirm this information. Eight Uyghurs whose testimonies we had taken denied knowledge of any news of deportations.

The Egyptian Interior Ministry, for its part, has actually admitted that a number of Uyghurs were arrested nearly 10 days after the start of the security crackdown, but did not specify the numbers of those arrested. A security source explained the security campaign in statements to Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper that “it comes within the framework of usual security procedures carried out by security authorities in the country to check residences of foreigners, and that preliminary investigations and examination of seized papers indicated that a number of them violated conditions of residence in the country.”<sup>2</sup> The security source denied news of the deportation of any Uyghur to China.

Initially, Al-Azhar denied news on the arrest of Uyghur students of, saying in a statement that “it is following what is being exchanged on a number of news sites and social media in that regard with concerned authorities, stressing that what is being broadcasted by some sites and channels in this regard, whether news or numbers, is not accurate at all, and what Al-Jazeera satellite channel

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1. Mohamed Ali El Din, El Masry Al Youm, AP, detention of dozens of Azhar Uyghur in Egypt pending their deportation to China, 6 July 2017. <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1158994>

2. Esam Abu Sdeira, Al Masry Al Youm, Security source denies deportation of Uyghur students: normal procedures to check papers of foreigners, 12 July 2017. <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1160174>

reported concerning the arrest of more than 500 is lies and malicious rumors.<sup>3</sup> However, the adviser to Sheikh Al-Azhar, Mohammad Muhani, in a statement to a television program on the same day, said that “43 people were arrested, including only 3 of Azhar students.”<sup>4</sup>

Al-Azhar sources told Al Youm Al Sabe'e newspaper release procedures for the a number of Uyghur students are ongoing after intervention by Sheikh Al Azhar, after confirming their affiliation to Al-Azhar and verification of validity of their residence in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> However, we were unable to verify the news of the release of any of those arrested, whether Azhar students or others.

On July 7, 2017, ECRF issued a press release demanding that the Egyptian authorities stop the campaign of arbitrary arrests against Uyghur students and clarify their legal position. On the same day, AFTE and Human Rights Watch sent a letter to Sheikh Al-Azhar to intervene to protect Uyghur students.<sup>6</sup> On July 20, 2017, AFTE, ECRF and Amnesty International issued a statement calling on the Egyptian government to allow detained Uyghur students to communicate with their lawyers and families and to have judicial oversight of their detention. On 3 August 2017, ECRF and AFTE sent a letter<sup>7</sup> to the National Council for Human Rights to intervene immediately, to confirm the illegal detention of Uyghurs to seek their immediate release or a declaration of the charges against them as well as to ensure their contact with lawyers. Despite repeated attempts by the two institutions to clarify the legal situation and the reasons for the detention of Uyghur students, the two institutions did not receive any responses from the Egyptian government.

The argument put forward by the Ministry of the Interior that what happened was nothing more than a normal procedure to ensure the legal status of foreigners living in Egypt is a weak and untenable argument. There has been no security movement of this kind or force against any other foreigners inside Egypt during this period.

Many doubts have been raised about an agreement between the Egyptian government and its Chinese counterpart that resulted in the security crackdown on Uyghurs, who live in the region of Turkistan, administratively affiliated to China. These suspicions were fueled by news of a security

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3. Ahmed El Beheiry, Al Masry Al Youm, AlAzhar denies arrest of Turkestan students, 8 July 2017. <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1159470>

4. Baligh Hamdi, ElBawaba, Azhar discloses new details on the arrest of Uyghur students, 8 July 2017. <http://www.albawabhnews.com/2604627>

5. Loai Aly, Al Youm Al Sabe'e, Azhar sources: Turkestan students released when proved to be registered and regular in attending their classes, 8 July 2017. <http://bit.ly/2gD1P4d>

6. [https://afteegypt.org/academic\\_freedom/2017/07/08/13220-afteegypt.html](https://afteegypt.org/academic_freedom/2017/07/08/13220-afteegypt.html)

7. [https://afteegypt.org/academic\\_freedom/2017/08/03/13289-afteegypt.html](https://afteegypt.org/academic_freedom/2017/08/03/13289-afteegypt.html)

agreement between the Egyptian Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China<sup>8</sup>. This agreement came less than a month before the Egyptian security crackdown on members of the Uyghur sect.

These doubts are also reinforced by the Chinese government's pressing wish to return Uyghur students studying in Egypt to Turkestan. Most of the testimonies gathered by the two institutions confirmed the Chinese government's pressure on students and their families to return.

Through this report, the two organizations seek to clarify and present the facts regarding the violations committed against the Uyghurs in Egypt beginning last June. In the first chapter of the report, we address the Uyghurs narrative through testimonies collected by researchers of the two institutions. The second chapter reviews the legal status of the Uyghurs in Egypt, whether arrested or threatened with arrest or who were able to leave Egypt due to the security attack on them.

In a short chapter, chapter III, the report examines the impact of what happened with the Uyghurs on expatriate Azhar students of other nationalities. In the fourth and last chapter, we review part of Egypt's history in dealing with politically threatened foreigners in their country. We review deportation of Eritreans after an agreement between the Egyptian government and its Eritrean counterpart in 2008. We added the last chapter after news of the Egyptian authorities' deportation of arrested Uyghurs to China at the request of the Chinese government. The report ends with a number of recommendations made by the two institutions to the Egyptian government regarding the Uyghurs, whether those arrested or those who managed to leave Egypt.

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8. El Tahrir newspaper, 19 June 2017, agreement between Abdelghaffar and Chinese deputy security ministerto combat terrorism <http://bit.ly/2eBuXbL>

## Uyghur's account of what happened

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Mahmud Muhammad, a 15-year-old Uyghur who has been living in Egypt for 15 years, was not aware after he left his house after midnight on Thursday, June 29, 2017, to spend a night at a friend's house, that an Egyptian police force would storm his house to look for him.

*«At 1:15 a police force entered the house and asked my wife and eldest son about me, but they said that I traveled to Turkey. They searched the house routinely and left after they went to the upper floors where other Uyghurs lived and asked them about me<sup>9</sup>».*

It was not the first time for Mohammed to know that others were asking him. Another Uyghur resident told him last Ramadan that Chinese security was communicating with him through an application he used to communicate with the Chinese abroad and sent him Mohamed's picture and asked about it. "I thought that I might be arrested, but I did not imagine that this would happen in such a terrible way,"<sup>10</sup> says Mohammed.

Mohammed sent his friend with whom he was staying to his home at the dawn of the day of the police raid to get him his passport and personal belongings. On Friday, 30 June, he boarded a plane to Saudi Arabia and from there to Turkey. "The security campaign against the Uyghur had not yet started, and there was no security at the airport as happened later,"<sup>11</sup> Mohammed explains how he easily got out of Cairo airport.

Muhammad asked his wife not to sleep and his children at home for fear of another raid, which is exactly what happened. The police raided the house again on Friday night, after its residents had left. They searched the place, and seized their personal belongings. Then they went to the upper floor and arrested a Uyghur student studying at the Islamic research institute. "The student was detained for three weeks and then managed to escape from Egypt, while my family who had left the house was able to catch up with me in Turkey two days later," Mohammed said.

Khaled (a pseudonym), an Uyghur who came to Egypt to study at Al-Azhar three years ago, notes their fear of the security persecution of Sheikh Mahmoud - as they call him - but they thought the matter would stop at that. He adds, "The police would not arrest Azhar students with legal and

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9. Whats App interview with Mahmoud Mohamed by AFTE researcher, 5 August 2017.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

sound residence papers.”<sup>12</sup>

However the police proved Khaled and his colleagues wrong. The attempt to arrest Mohamed was but the first step in a wider security campaign that began beginning July 2017 targeting dozens belonging to the Uyghur sect<sup>13</sup> in Egypt. Ibrahim (pseudonym), a Uyghur student studying at the Islamic research institute says:

*“The arrests began on Monday 3 July. About 110 people were arrested until now. The beginning was in the 7th district<sup>14</sup>, where they arrested about 80 from the streets, restaurants, shops and homes; then they stopped about 27 Uyghurs in the Cairo, Hurghada and Borg El Arab airports.”<sup>15</sup>*

Mahmoud Mohamed says the police raided the “Aslam” restaurant in the 7<sup>th</sup> district, where the owners and most of the workers are from the Uyghur. They arrested no less than 30 individuals. One Egyptian eyewitness adds “It was the first time for me to enter the place. I was repairing something at a nearby electrician and I entered the restaurant to have lunch. The police came in, asked for their passports and arrested all the Chinese present in addition to an Egyptian, who was released at night. The police was treating them with great respect.”<sup>16</sup>

Ibrahim (pseudonym) was at home when a friend called and told hi of a security campaign that is targeting them now. He decided to leave his home and the whole area. He says “I saw them arrest two people, not more than 50 meters away from where I was. They took them away, and I managed to escape.”<sup>17</sup>

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12. Whats App interview with Khaled (pseudonym) by AFTE researcher, 6 August 2017

13. Uyghurs are the population of the Turkestan region of the People’s Republic of China. The majority are Muslims. Many demand the independence from China.

14. The majority of Uyghurs in Egypt live in the 7<sup>th</sup> district of Nasr City.

15. Whats App interview with Ibrahim (pseudonym) by AFTE researcher, 3 August 2017.

16. Testimony of an Egyptian who was present at the time of arrest of Uyghurs from the restaurant, 6 July. We withheld his name for his safety. Testimony taken by ECRF researcher.

17. Ibrahim testimony.

Emad El Din (pseudonym) has dual nationality, Chinese/Turkish. He registered at Al Azhar as a Chinese student and did not change his papers until now. Until the last security campaign he was only using his Chinese ID. He says:

***“I was at home. We heard about the arrests. Students left their homes trying to escape the area. However, many of them were arrested from the streets. I decided to use my Turkish ID so that I escape the harm or the arrest because of my Chinese nationality.”***<sup>18</sup>

Abdallah Nour El Din (pseudonym) who has left Egypt and is helping others to leave through providing flight tickets, says that many left their homes as a result of the security campaign and escaped to other governorates, such as Alexandria or Mansoura. “Some of our brethren, their wives and children have not had food for two days”<sup>19</sup>, he adds.

Khaled, was about to receive his Azhar high school diploma but for the security crackdown that forced him to flee to Turkey, was at his home in the seventh district when he received news of the arrest of his friends. “So I and three of my colleagues decided to travel to Hurghada and from there to Turkey. We feared we might get arrested if we left through Cairo airport,”<sup>20</sup> says Khaled.

On his way to Hurghada, Khalid became sure he was on the right track; he learned that other colleagues trying to get out of Cairo and Burg Al Arab airports had been arrested. Khaled tells us about their trip out of Egypt:

***«We were four on the way to Hurghada. One of my friends called me and told me that one of my colleagues was on the list of the Egyptian security. We advised him not to travel with us to avoid his and our arrest from the airport. He remained in Egypt».***<sup>21</sup>

«He adds, “When we arrived in Hurghada, we were contacted by friends who told us that Uyghurs had been stopped at Hurghada airport and advised us to try the Sharm el-Sheikh airport. So we went to Sharm el-Sheikh and were able to travel to Dubai and from there to Turkey”<sup>22</sup>».

Khaled and his friends’ trip to leave Egypt lasted for five whole days. They left Cairo on the morning of July 4, and left from Sharm el-Sheikh airport on the eighth of the same month. “At Sharm el-Sheikh airport, no one asked us about anything. They did not seem to know what was

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18. Whats App interview with Emad El Din (pseudonym) by AFTE researcher, 5 August 2017

19. Whats App interview with Abdallah Nour El Din (pseudonym) by ECRF researcher, 8 July 2017

20. Khaled testimony.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

happening in Cairo”, says Khaled.

Contrary to the Sharm el-Sheikh airport group, which managed to escape from Egypt, other Uyghurs were less fortunate with other Egyptian airports. According to the testimonies we collected, at least 30 were arrested from the airports of Cairo, Hurghada, Burg al-Arab and Nuweiba, in addition to those who were arrested by the police, and were later released and allowed to travel.

Mahmoud Mohammed, who, worked since his departure to Turkey, has been counting the numbers of arrested Uyghurs, as well as help those who remained in Egypt to leave, says;

*»On July 6, 29 people were arrested at Borg al-Arab airport, five of them were released and allowed to travel, while 24 were held and transferred on July 18 to Cairo to join the others. Seven were arrested at Hurghada airport, and three others (including two women) while they were on their way to the same airport, but the Egyptian authorities released them later. In the port of Nuweiba, three families were stopped while trying to travel by sea; later two families released and one family remained in police custody.»<sup>23</sup>*

Ibrahim adds:

*«At Cairo airport, a friend and his pregnant wife tried to travel to Turkey but the police at the airport arrested them and they were held at the airport for a whole month, after which the wife was allowed to travel to Turkey while the husband was taken to prison to join his detained colleagues».<sup>24</sup>*

According to testimonies collected from more than one source, the total number of Uyghurs arrested by the Egyptian police during their security campaign or from airports at a later date ranges approximately between 90 to 120.

Several indicators point to the presence of a wanted list for Uyghurs in Egypt, which in turn points to an agreement between the Egyptian and Chinese governments on this matter. “The Egyptian government certainly has a list of names wanted by the Chinese side,<sup>25</sup>” said Mahmoud Mohammed. This is also supported by police arresting several Uyghurs at airports and then allowing them to travel later. “After the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, at least 15 people were arrested at various dates and were later released and were able to travel to Turkey,<sup>26</sup>” says Mahmoud Mohammed.

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23. Mohamed Mahmoud testimony.

24. Ibrahim testimony.

25. Mahmoud Mohamed testimony.

26. Ibid.

The detainees were initially held in the police stations of Nasr City I and II, Elkhalifah, Elsalam II, El Nozha and Heliopolis, according to two separate testimonies<sup>27</sup>. Until now, we have not been able to have an official confirmation of the final place of detention of the arrested Uyghurs, but most of the testimonies indicate that they are in the Tora prison complex. Ismail (pseudonym) says:

«All those arrested in the previous security crackdown and those who were arrested from airports are held at Tora reception prison; they more than a hundred.» He adds, “I was able to communicate with a Uyghur inside prison<sup>28</sup>. Mahmoud Mohammed said “Our lawyers went to ask in prison, but officials there denied their presence<sup>29</sup>”.

According to four separate testimonies taken by the two organizations with members of the Uyghur who remain in Egypt or managed to leave for turkey, Chinese investigators are questioning a number of Uyghurs still held in detention by the Egyptian government. One testimony indicated that some detained were subjected to torture during the interrogation. However the two organizations were unable to confirm this information from independent sources. Mahmud Mohamed says:

***“Chinese investigators questioned between 10 to 15 Uyghurs arrested in Egypt inside their places of detention. They asked them about their views about China, the ruling communist party and whether they were members of the Turkistan Islamic party.”<sup>30</sup>***

Since the beginning of the Egyptian security campaign against them last July, between 300 – 400 Uyghurs managed to flee from Egypt to Turkey according to Mohamed Mahmud.<sup>31</sup> Only a few dozen Uyghurs remain in Egypt. Most of my friends left for Turkey and I am trying to travel now. Nobody I know wants to stay in Egypt after what happened<sup>32</sup>. He adds:

***I will not return to Egypt if I manage to travel, because El Azhar in Egypt cannot protect us. We came here legally and with the approval of the Egyptian government. I don't know why this is happening to us?<sup>33</sup>***

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27. Abdel Rahman testimony (pseudonym) taken by ECRF researcher, 17 July 2017.

28. Ismail testimony (pseudonym) taken over the phone by ECRF researcher, 29 July 2017.

29. Mahmoud Mohamed testimony.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibrahim testimony.

33. Ibrahim testimony.

## Legal situation of Uyghur students in Egypt

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To understand the legal status of the Uyghurs in Egypt, we can classify them into three categories: the Uyghurs who left Egypt; those who are detained by the Egyptian government; and finally those residing in Egypt who have not been arrested.

### Uyghurs who left Egypt

This group again can be classified into three groups. The first includes the Uyghurs who have been forcibly deported to China, assuming validity of media channels which published this news, and which the two organizations were unable to verify. In case the Egyptian government has deported them it has thereby violated international law by deporting individuals who may be subjected to human rights violations according to article (3) of the UN convention against torture, degrading or inhumane treatment or punishment of 1984 (CAT), which states that “No State Party shall expel, return (“refouler”) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.” Egypt has ratified this convention and is thereby obliged to its enforcement since 26 June 1987. Egyptian authorities would thereby be complicit in any violations that may happen against the deported students.

The second group includes two students<sup>34</sup> who have been deported by a decision of the ministry of interior, which has issued a decision to expel from Egyptian territories Uyghur students for reasons related to public interest. They are thereby prohibited from returning to Egypt except upon permission by the minister of interior, according to article (31) of law 89/1960 concerning the entry and residence of foreigners in the Arab Republic of Egypt and their exit there from, which states that “No foreigner who has previously been expelled from Egypt is allowed to return to the ARE except after permission by the minister of interior.” Those who wish to return would have to submit a request to the minister of interior or appeal the decision through their lawyers.

The third group included Uyghurs who left Egypt upon their own will. Those can return to Egypt provided their residence papers are sound, valid and legal according to law 89/1960.

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34. Ministry of Interior, decision no. 1126/2017. Official Gazette, no. 177, 6 August.

## Uyghurs held in detention by the Egyptian government

This group, which comprises students held in Egyptian detention places, are of two types: the first are those whose place of detention is known but are prevented from communicating with their lawyers and families and have been arrested by Egyptian security forces without an order by the prosecution or a decision by the minister of interior<sup>35</sup>. This violation is defined as incommunicado detention, which is a violation of article (54) of the Egyptian 2014 constitution, which states that “Except for the case of being caught in flagrante delicto, it is not permissible to arrest, search, detain, or restrict the freedom of anyone in any way except by virtue of a reasoned judicial order that was required in the context of an investigation. Every person whose freedom is restricted shall be immediately notified of the reasons therefore; shall be informed of his/her rights in writing; shall be immediately enabled to contact his/her relatives and lawyer; and shall be brought before the investigation authority within twenty four (24) hours as of the time of restricting his/her freedom, after which it would either decide his arrest or release.”<sup>36</sup>

The second group includes those forcibly disappeared, such as the case of Uyghur student Mokhtar Rowai, documented by the two organizations.<sup>37</sup> He was arrested by Egyptian security forces in the port of Nuwaiba while he was on his way to Jordan, together with two other Uyghur students. After some time the two students were released, but until the time of writing this report there is no information about Mokhtar, which qualifies him as a case of forced disappearance<sup>38</sup>, according to the definition by the international criminal court of forced disappearance as when persons are arrested, detained or abducted against their will or otherwise deprived of their liberty by officials of different branches or levels of Government, or by organized groups or private individuals acting on behalf of, or with the support, direct or indirect, consent or acquiescence of the Government, followed by a refusal to disclose the fate or whereabouts of the persons concerned or a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty, which places such persons outside the protection of the law.”<sup>39</sup>

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35. Interview by Mohamed Mostafa with Ezzat Ghoneim; defence lawyer of Uyghur students, ECRE, Giza, 10 August

36. Article 36 of law of criminal procedures <http://laws.jp.gov.eg/home/altshryat/alqwanyn-aljnayyte>

37. Interview by Mohamed Mostafa with wife of disappeared Uyghur student Mokhtar Roaie, Cairo, ECRE, 12 August

38. Ezzat Ghoneim, Ibid.

39. ICC Rome statutes, article 7, Last accessed 15/8/2017 <https://www.icrc.org/ara/resources/documents/misc/6e7ec5.htm>

## Uyghurs who remain free in Egypt

Those are Uyghurs who continue to reside in Egypt and have not been arrested. The first group among them have valid residence permits and have applied for asylum to the UNHCR, but whose appointments for personal interviews were set at a very late date and UNHCR was unable to advance the dates of their appointment. The second group includes students who want to apply for asylum but couldn't in view of possible security risks upon application. UNHCR tried to set up a committee to meet asylum seekers at a relatively safe place, but the attempt did not work.

In case of deportation of those two groups, Egyptian authorities would be violating article 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph of the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, 1969<sup>40</sup> which states that “No person shall be subjected by a Member State to measures such as rejection at the frontier, return or expulsion, which would compel him to return to or remain in a territory where his life, physical integrity or liberty would be threatened.”

The third group comprises Uyghurs whose residence has expired and have not been able to renew it because of difficulties by the Chinese embassy in Cairo. A group of Uyghurs students were arrested in Hurghada because of the expiry of their residence. They were brought before the Public Prosecution and charged with violating conditions of residence in ARE, were fined 3000 LE and were released after payment. In this case, the students had two options. The first was to apply to the Ministry of Interior to renew the residence and the second was to leave the country, which is what those students did<sup>41</sup>, according to article 16 of Law No. 89 of 1960, which states that “Every foreign resident in ARE must have a permit of residence and must leave the country upon expiry of the permit.”

The Egyptian state has signed several international conventions that prohibit the deportation of individuals to countries where they may be subjected to human rights violations. The actions of the Egyptian government in the Uyghur crisis have violated a set of articles of these conventions, which it pledged to enforce. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states in article 13 that: “An alien lawfully in the territory of a State Party to the present Covenant may be expelled therefrom only in pursuance of a decision reached in accordance with law and shall, except where compelling reasons of national security otherwise require, be allowed to submit the reasons against his expulsion and to have his case reviewed by, and be represented for

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40. Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa, 1969, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/arab/afr-ref-dec.html>

41. Ezzat Ghoneim, Ibid.

the purpose before, the competent authority or a person or persons especially designated by the competent authority.’

The Egyptian government may have violated the previous articles if the news circulated and human rights appeals concerning the deportation of a number of Uyghurs students to China are true, especially that Egyptian authorities know for sure that these students will be subjected to human rights violations that could amount to execution.

Initially Egyptian security dealt very harshly with lawyers who took the initiative to support the Uyghurs, to the extent that state security summoned a number of those lawyers. However, after the lawyers obtained powers of attorney the families of detained Uyghur students, the degree of security hostility with lawyers was reduced and began a course of cooperation to resolve the crisis. It was agreed that Uyghurs who have not been arrested would leave Egypt through a return ticket to China that includes a host country. This is what some of the students did who were able to leave Egypt in the past. They booked a flight ticket to China which included a transit in Turkey. Most of those students have a residence in turkey. However, the major problem of students still detained by the Egyptian government without any legal basis remains unresolved.

## The Uyghur crisis and its impact on foreign students

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Al-Azhar University is the largest Egyptian university in terms of the number of foreign students<sup>42</sup>. The university is a destination for Muslim students from all over the world to study Islamic sciences. Therefore two organizations sought to understand the impact of the Uyghur crisis on the rest of foreign students. A testimony of a foreign student from Kazakhstan was that he was not concerned about his personal safety and that the situation was safe in Egypt and Al-Azhar Foundation was working to protect its students and provide them with comfort; and that what happened to Uyghur students is just a routine procedure to which the Egyptian state is entitled to maintain its security<sup>43</sup>.

On the other hand, Abdullah (a pseudonym) is another foreign student, who said that the crisis of Uyghur students made him seriously consider terminating his studies at Al-Azhar University and leaving Egypt. He believes that Al-Azhar did not protect its students, and that he does not rule out the possibility of Egyptian security authorities arresting him upon the wish of the ruling regime in his country, especially that he is a member of the opposition. Abdallah believes that Egypt's ruling regime is prepared to do anything in return for money and economic benefits<sup>44</sup>.

Harassment by Egyptian security has not been limited to Uyghur students, but have been extended to Azhar students of other nationalities. Security forces at Nasr City I police station had arrested between 35 to 40 students from Tajikistan, Indonesia and Chechnya. The Minister of the Interior issued deportation orders for six students<sup>45</sup> of these nationalities and an Indonesian female student<sup>46</sup>. There is no news regarding the remainder of the detained students until the time of writing this report.

The Uighur crisis is likely to have affected foreign students at Al-Azhar University, especially after students from other nationalities were arrested and deported from Egypt, without any step taken by Al-Azhar University to defend them or clarify their legal position and the reasons for their detention or deportation.

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42. Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), 2015, annual newsletter, Cairo, p. 181 (Arabic).

43. Whats App Interview by Mohamed Mostafa of a foreign Azhar student, ECRE, 14 August.

44. Whats App Interview by Mohamed Mostafa of a foreign Azhar student, ECRE, 19 August

45. Ministry of Interior, decision no. 1126/2017. Official Gazette, no. 177, 6 August

46. Ministry of Interior, decision no. 1125/2017. Official Gazette, no. 177, 6 August

## Egyptian authorities and a long record of violations (the example of Eritreans)

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Egyptian authorities have a long record of violations against asylum seekers and minorities from African countries. In mid-2007, 25 people of African nationalities were liquidated by Egyptian security forces as they tried to cross the Egyptian border to escape the hell they suffered in their countries. Also, 1,300 civilians were tried before Egyptian military courts. In June 2008, the Egyptian authorities forcibly deported nearly 1,200 Eritreans, returning them to their country to face serious human rights violations there.<sup>47</sup>

International reports on this crisis report cases of killings by Egyptian security forces of individuals crossing the Egyptian border, including women and elderly. Hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa and Sudan are risking their lives to cross nearly 250 kilometres along the Egyptian border to reach Israel, with the help of local smugglers in return for money paid by migrants. Some of these migrants have the financial ability to reside in Egypt illegally.

While thousands of migrants are trying to cross the Egyptian border into Israel, many of them get arrested, their belongings confiscated and deported to El Arish as a prelude to their military trial on charges of attempting to illegally leave the eastern Egyptian border. With increasing Israeli pressure at the time on the Egyptian government to stop the flow of migrants, Egyptian authorities intensified their efforts to prevent the infiltration of migrants into Israel<sup>48</sup>. Between 2007 and 2008, approximately 1,300 migrants were referred to trials, convicted and sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of 2000 Egyptian pounds (equivalent to 376 US dollars at this time). The Court also recommended that they be repatriated, in violation of international law and standards of fair trials. Egyptian authorities did not allow those migrants to communicate with representatives of the UNHCR, although some of them might have been asylum seekers and in need of international protection.

During this period, Egyptian authorities tightened measures to control the country's southern border with Sudan. as soon as migrants cross the Egyptian border they are arrested and

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47. Amnesty International, 2008, EGYPT: DEADLY JOURNEYS THROUGH THE DESERT, August 20, last accessed: 12/8/2017. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2008/08/egypt-deadly-journey-through-desert-20080820/>

48. Amnesty International, 2007, Egypt: Rights of Individuals intercepted at the border with Israel must be protected, August 15, , last accessed: 12/8/2017. [http://amnesty-polizei.de/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/kampagne\\_nigeria\\_news\\_1507.pdf](http://amnesty-polizei.de/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/kampagne_nigeria_news_1507.pdf)

subsequently deported to their countries. In February 2008 hundreds of Eritrean migrants were able to enter Egypt via its southern border with Sudan or through the Red Sea. Although the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Sudan recognized many of them as refugees, they were convicted by the Egyptian authorities, denied access to UNHCR officials in Egypt and sentenced to one month in prison. They were forcibly returned to Eritrea, in violation by Egyptian authorities of international law and principles of treatment of asylum seekers.

In June 2008 there were approximately 1,200 Eritrean citizens in Egypt were threatened with forcible deportation to Eritrea<sup>49</sup>. According to Amnesty International reports, the Egyptian authorities had already deported Eritrean citizens to their country. Amnesty International researchers were able to communicate with an official at Aswan airport who told them that hundreds of Eritreans are estimated to be detained and will be deported on three planes to Eritrea<sup>50</sup>. Most of the deported were men in addition to a number of women who were held in a military camp in the Waya area, where they were subjected to major human rights abuses.

The treatment by Egyptian authorities of the Uyghurs reminds us of the forced deportation and illegal detention of Eritrean and other African nationalities. It also increases the likelihood that Egyptian authorities may deport a number of detained Uyghurs to China.

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49. Amnesty International, 2008, EGYPT: DEADLY JOURNEYS THROUGH THE DESERT, August 15, last accessed 12/8/2017. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE12/015/2008/en/>

50. Interview by Mohamed Mostafa of Mohamed Lotfy, former amnesty researcher, Giza, Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms. 2017.

## Recommendations

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### To the Egyptian government

- Disclosure of places of detention and numbers of detained Uyghurs and the legal reasons for their arrest and detention.
- Immediate release of individuals belonging to the Uyghur community who are illegally detained in Egyptian prisons.
- Enable those legally charged among them to contact their relatives and lawyers.
- Disclosure of valid information related to the Egyptian government's deportation of a number of Uyghurs to China.
- Ending the persecution of Uyghurs who have not been arrested, whether inside Egypt or were able to travel abroad during the security campaign, so that they can return and resume their studies at Al-Azhar.

### To Al-Azhar institution

- The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar must intervene to urge the Egyptian government to immediately release Uyghur students registered at Al-Azhar University and affiliated institutes.
- Facilitating registration procedures for Uyghur students, since the Chinese Embassy in Cairo obstructs the issuance of the requested official documents needed for registering at Al Azhar
- Ensure that no foreign students of other nationalities are subjected to security harassment that hinders their studies in Al-Azhar.

## **National Council for Human Rights**

- The National Council for Human Rights must immediately intervene to investigate illegal detentions of Uyghurs and seek to release them or disclose their charges and ensure their communication with lawyers.
- The Council must work to stop any deportations of Uyghurs planned by Egyptian authorities.