

# The Judicial Persecution of Human Rights Defenders in Egypt

An Analytical Paper on Incidents of Targeting and Prosecution



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## Introduction

Human rights defenders in Egypt walk a path fraught with risks, facing serious threats and dangers and paying a heavy price for their peaceful and legitimate work in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms; imprisonment is among the most prominent of these risks.

In this context, international conventions and covenants have affirmed the necessity of providing full protection for them, considering them a fundamental pillar in promoting the rule of law and respect for rights and freedoms. Foremost among these is the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1998, which affirmed the obligation of states to protect defenders from all forms of violations, whether committed by official authorities or non-state actors. The Declaration also emphasized the necessity of taking the measures required to ensure their protection, preventing perpetrators of violations from enjoying impunity, and creating a safe and enabling environment for their work, while refraining from criminalizing their activities or punishing them for providing support or assistance in the field of human rights, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of association, and the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The Declaration further affirms a set of fundamental rights that are indispensable for enabling defenders to perform their role, including the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and its protection, as well as the right to freedom of association and the right to freedom of opinion and expression, in order to ensure that defenders are able to undertake their activities to promote and protect human rights, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, obtain, receive, and impart information without restrictions.

However, in recent years, the Egyptian authorities have intensified their targeting of human rights defenders, activists, and dissenting voices through unlawful summonses, coercive interrogations, and the imposition of surveillance measures outside the scope of judicial oversight. Some have also been subjected to physical and moral threats, travel bans, arrest, accusations related to the peaceful exercise of their rights, inclusion on “terrorist lists,” and referral to unfair trials before exceptional courts, which in some cases have issued unjust verdicts. In addition, offices have been closed or the activities of organizations frozen, and restrictions have been imposed on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Despite the legal obligations incumbent upon the state to protect human rights defenders, this reality has created an extremely difficult working environment for defenders, many of whom face legal, administrative, and psychological pressures that affect their ability to document violations or provide legal support to victims. Fear of persecution has also led to the spread of self-censorship, the reduction of public activities, and the relocation of some activists to work from abroad.

This report sheds light on the restrictions and violations faced by human rights defenders, reviewing judicial prosecutions, prolonged pretrial detention, and the practice of “rotation” (tadweer) affecting defenders referred to trial during the period from September 2024 to December 2025, based on case files and lawyers’ testimonies. It also examines the performance of terrorism circuits and their impact on fair trial guarantees, with a focus on monitoring and documenting the cases of defenders referred to trial.

Finally, the report recommends the release of human rights defenders detained pending trial or held in pretrial detention due to the legitimate performance of their professional duties, the expression of their opinions, or their legitimate political activities. It also calls for an impartial and transparent investigation into allegations of enforced disappearance, torture, and ill-treatment, bringing perpetrators before fair trials, urging the Public Prosecutor to ensure that defendants are tried before their natural judge, and calling for the abolition of terrorism circuits.



## Executive Summary

This report monitors the situation of human rights defenders in Egypt. It focuses on defenders referred to trial by the Supreme State Security Prosecution before terrorism courts during the period from September 2024 to December 2025. The report analyzes 110 cases referred by the Supreme State Security Prosecution to trial and confirms the inclusion of 15 human rights defenders among them, noting that some of these defenders were included in more than one case.

The report reveals a recurring pattern of judicial prosecution linked to the practice of human rights work, whereby counterterrorism legislation is used to bring politically motivated charges, relying primarily on National Security investigations in the absence of sufficient material evidence supporting such accusations.

The report also highlights the expanded use of prolonged pretrial detention in violation of the law, transforming it from a precautionary measure into a tool for long-term detention, alongside the practice of “case rotation” (tadweer), which is used to keep defendants in detention by including them in new cases carrying the same charges.

The report further documents the referral of an increasing number of cases to terrorism circuits, whose sessions are held inside security facilities and lack a few fair trial guarantees, including public hearings and effective communication between defendants and their lawyers. In addition, terrorism circuits raise concerns due to their tendency to convict defenders.

The bias of these courts is clearly reflected in the limited number of release orders they have issued in recent years. According to statistics issued by human rights organizations, during 2025 the two terrorism circuits issued 10 release orders in the last quarter of the year during 78 sessions held by the two circuits, while issuing no fewer than 21,802 detention renewal orders distributed across 2,206 State Security cases, without issuing a single release order for any defendant until October 2025. In 2024, not a single release order was issued for any defendant before the terrorism circuits, which issued approximately 45,965 detention renewal orders during 104 sessions in 3,217 State Security cases. Likewise, in 2023, the terrorism circuits issued 3 release orders during 127 detention renewal sessions in 3,140 cases, while issuing 35,966 detention renewal orders. In 2022, the terrorism circuits issued 353 release orders during 141 detention renewal sessions in 2,294 cases and issued 25,034 detention renewal orders.

In the broader context, the report indicates that these practices have contributed to shrinking civic space, reducing the activities of civil society organizations, spreading self-censorship, and pushing a few human rights defenders to cease their work or leave the country.

The report concludes that the continuation of these patterns constitutes a violation of constitutional and international obligations related to the protection of rights and freedoms. It emphasizes the need for urgent measures, including the release of those detained because of their peaceful work, ending the use of pretrial detention as a punitive tool, and ensuring fair trials before the natural judge.



## Methodology

The report adopted an objective criterion for determining the category of human rights defenders referred by the State Security Prosecution to trial before terrorism circuits.

The report relies on the definition of human rights defenders contained in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which describes them as “individuals, groups and associations contributing to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals.”

The report documented 110 cases referred by the Supreme State Security Prosecution during the period from 1 September 2024 until the end of December 2025. It confirmed the inclusion of 15 human rights defenders in the referral orders issued in these cases, taking into account that some defenders were referred in more than one case, with some included in two cases and another in three cases.

The report relied primarily on official documents, including police reports, Supreme State Security Prosecution investigations, official complaints and telegrams, as well as information contained in referral orders for cases before the courts.

In addition to analyzing these documents, personal interviews were conducted with a number of the institution’s lawyers who represented defenders referred to trial, with the aim of comparing the information contained in the investigations with their clients’ accounts, based on their direct observations and experiences. The lawyers preferred not to disclose their identities for fear of security reprisals, reflecting the climate of fear and pressure surrounding their work, as documented in this report.

When necessary, the report also relied on reports issued by human rights organizations as supplementary sources for monitoring developments in the cases, in addition to certain journalistic sources to complete the monitoring and documentation of violations to which lawyers were subjected during litigation proceedings, with references to these sources provided in the footnotes.

## Section One: Restrictions on Human Rights Defenders

This section addresses the restrictions imposed on human rights defenders, beginning with the legislative environment that has affected rights and freedoms in Egypt amid the overlap of restrictive legislative frameworks with security practices on the ground. It reviews how this environment has been associated with restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association, and peaceful assembly, alongside patterns of violations that included security summonses, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and ill-treatment, all of which have contributed to shrinking civic space and limiting the work of human rights defenders.

The legislative authority in Egypt has enacted an arsenal of laws restricting freedoms and rights, with the aim of narrowing the public sphere and limiting the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of opinion and expression, under the pretext of combating terrorism and organized crime that threaten public order and national security.

This began with the Protest Law, which restricted the right to assembly, followed by the criminalization of the publication of false news and cybercrime laws, in addition to counterterrorism laws and legislation regulating terrorist entities, culminating in the Law Regulating Civil Society Work, which imposed broad restrictions on the work of non-governmental organizations.

Civil society organizations in Egypt face restrictions and harassment that undermine the right to freedom of association, beginning with restrictions on receiving funding, passing through the imposition of penalties that may reach imprisonment, and ending with the restrictions imposed by Law No. 149 of 2019 Regulating Civil Society Work and its Executive Regulations, which affect the registration of organizations, their operations, and their ability to secure resources. The law also grants the executive authority broad powers to interfere in the affairs of civil society organizations, monitor them, and even dissolve them, leading to the marginalization of their role.

The law subject's civil society organizations to state oversight through the Ministry of Social Solidarity and restricts the scope of their work to the framework of “community development,” a broad concept that can be used to limit human rights advocacy activities. The law prohibits a few core activities, such as conducting opinion polls and field research and publishing their results, as well as cooperating with foreign entities without prior approval. It also relies on vague definitions of prohibited activities, such as

what constitutes a violation of “public order,” “public morals,” or “national unity,” and imposes strict restrictions on foreign funding while granting the authorities broad powers to obstruct it. The Executive Regulations also require associations to return funding within five days if it is rejected, thereby limiting their right to challenge such decisions.

In August 2018, the government issued Law No. 175 on Cybercrimes, which provided a legal cover for surveillance of the digital space, relying on vague concepts such as “national security,” thereby allowing the blocking of websites, the monitoring of users, and the criminal prosecution of individuals and digital platforms.

About counterterrorism legislation, a pattern has emerged of its use against certain human rights defenders. Law No. 8 of 2015 on the Regulation of Terrorist Entities contains broad and vague definitions of the concepts of “terrorist” and “terrorist entities,” potentially encompassing various forms of organization. Law No. 94 of 2015 on Combating Terrorism also grants security agencies broad powers, including the use of force while providing legal protection from accountability in certain cases. It further grants judicial officers' exceptional powers, such as collecting evidence and detaining suspects for extended periods without judicial authorization, powers that were previously associated with states of emergency.

Within this context, some human rights defenders have been subjected to grave violations, including enforced disappearance, torture, and ill-treatment.

“It is worth noting that human rights researcher Ibrahim Ezz El-Din was arrested on 11 June 2019 and remained forcibly disappeared for 167 days until he appeared before the State Security Prosecution on 26 November 2019 in connection with State Security Case No. 488 of 2019. The State Security Prosecution charged him with joining a terrorist group and spreading false news. Ezz El-Din stated that he had been subjected to torture during his disappearance, explaining that he was detained in an undisclosed location where he suffered physical and psychological abuse. He was then placed in solitary confinement for several days, during which he was subjected to unlawful blindfolded interrogations regarding his work on housing rights issues. This was followed by practices of starvation, threats and intimidation, sleep deprivation by forcing him to keep his hands raised continuously and finally threats to kill him to extract specific confessions.”

“Human rights researcher Patrick George was arrested in the early hours of 7 February 2020 at Cairo International Airport, where he was unlawfully subjected to enforced detention and prevented from communicating with his lawyer and family for more than 24 hours. During that time, he was interrogated at the airport before being transferred to a National Security headquarters in Cairo and then to the National Security headquarters in Mansoura. On Saturday morning, Patrick appeared before the South Mansoura Prosecution, which ordered his detention for 15 days pending investigation in Administrative Case No. 7245 of 2019, Mansoura. During the investigations, Patrick stated that he had been subjected to threats, torture, and electric shocks during his disappearance while being questioned about his work and activities.”

### **In addition to direct physical assaults:**

“It is worth noting that human rights lawyer Gamal Eid was assaulted four times in less than three months. In October 2019, his car was stolen, and during the same month he was subjected to an attempted abduction and severe physical assault on a street leading to his home, resulting in fractures and bruises to his ribs. Before the end of the same month, unknown individuals intercepted him and smashed the windows of the car he was using as a replacement for his stolen vehicle. On 29 December, he was beaten and thrown to the ground in front of his home by security personnel traveling in three vehicles, after a National Security officer—known personally to Gamal—ordered them to douse him with paint to mock and humiliate him.”

In addition, smear campaigns and hate speech targeting human rights defenders, lawyers, and independent journalists by state-controlled media and on the internet constitute a systematic pattern of repression in Egypt. Such smear campaigns typically revolve around accusations of treason, serving foreign interests against Egypt, undermining national security and national unity, immorality, and collaboration with the Muslim Brotherhood. Their purpose is to damage the credibility of these individuals, undermine public trust in their work, and create a hostile environment toward human rights activities. They contribute to the stigmatization of activists and accusations of treason or foreign allegiance, exposing them to social and professional risks and limiting their ability to continue their public activities.

Many human rights defenders have also faced security restrictions, including repeated summonses by security agencies, informal interrogations, threats of imprisonment, and subjection to monitoring measures outside legal frameworks. These practices have led some defenders to cease their human rights work or leave the country.

**“I received a call from a National Security officer requesting that I appear for an informal interrogation. I was compelled to go, and I was questioned about the nature of my work as a human rights lawyer. After I left, I completely abandoned human rights work out of fear of being imprisoned.”**

**“I was summoned by the National Security Agency and was forced to go because of threats directed at my family. For months, I was engaged in a constant back-and-forth with them. I left my home and moved between several locations because I refused to cooperate with them. As a result, I was threatened with imprisonment more than once and was ultimately forced to flee Egypt.”**

**Amid the systematic repression exercised by the Egyptian authorities against human rights defenders, many have resorted to fleeing Egypt and living in exile in the hope of continuing their work in a safe environment. However, some continue to face security persecution by Egyptian state agencies, the freezing of their identification documents, and the refusal of certain Egyptian consulates abroad to renew their passports or issue powers of attorney. Their family members in Egypt have also been targeted, whether through security summonses or arrest and inclusion in politically motivated cases, with the aim of silencing human rights defenders abroad.**

**In addition, a few human rights defenders have been repeatedly summoned before the State Security Prosecution and investigated after being accused of spreading false news, only to be released on high monetary bail intended to impose financial exhaustion, rather than being released on the guarantee of their place of residence.**

**“It is worth noting that the State Security Prosecution summoned human rights lawyer and political activist Mahienour El-Massry, who was questioned by the Supreme State Security Prosecution on 18 August 2025 in connection with State Security Case No. 6322 of 2025. The prosecution charged her with disseminating false news, statements, and rumors inside and outside Egypt, and ordered her release on bail of EGP 50,000 pending the case.”**

**“Likewise, Dr. Aida Seif El-Dawla, one of the founders of the El Nadeem Center, was summoned for questioning before the State Security Prosecution on 15 February 2026 in connection with State Security Case No. 809 of 2026. The prosecution brought the same charges against her and ordered her release on bail of EGP 100,000.”**

Finally, repeated summonses and investigations in multiple cases over short periods have become a pattern. Ahmed Douma was investigated in seven different cases on allegations of spreading false news in relation to his human rights activities and writings. He had previously been released in six of these cases on high financial bail, the total amount of which reached EGP 230,000, before being re-detained on 6 April 2026 in connection with State Security Case No. 2449 of 2026 after the State Security Prosecution charged him with spreading false news domestically and abroad.

The increasing restrictions imposed on human rights work in Egypt have had profound effects on civil society and human rights defenders, leading to a noticeable decline in their ability to operate because of growing legal and security pressures. This has been reflected in the suspension or reduction of activities by a few prominent human rights organizations.



## Section Two: Judicial Prosecution and Prolonged Pretrial Detention of Human Rights Defenders

In addition to the restrictions and threats faced by institutions and individuals defending human rights, some human rights defenders are subjected to prosecution, security raids, arrest, and inclusion in politically motivated cases. The Egyptian authorities routinely employ counterterrorism legislation to prosecute them, investigate them before the Supreme State Security Prosecution, bring terrorism-related charges against them, and, in some cases, issue arbitrary judgments as punishment for carrying out their human rights work. A notable example is the judgment issued against members of the Egyptian Coordination, due to their work documenting and publishing human rights violations. This is in addition to decisions placing individuals on terrorist lists, along with the accompanying measures of asset freezes and travel bans under the Law Regulating Terrorist Entities.

The Egyptian authorities have used arbitrary pretrial detention in violation of the law as a tool to punish opponents and human rights defenders, contrary to the purpose for which it was originally enacted. It has been transformed from a precautionary measure into a means of long-term detention without trial or judicial conviction, thereby restricting the right to personal liberty. The Supreme State Security Prosecution and the terrorism circuits deliberately disregard the period of pretrial detention already served by defendants and fail to acknowledge that it has exceeded the legal maximum, thereby denying their release.

The practice of “case rotation” (tadweer), whereby defendants are included in new cases with similar charges before their release or after release orders have been issued, has also been employed, resulting in the recalculation of pretrial detention periods from the beginning. In practice, this mechanism is used to keep detainees in custody for indefinite periods despite the expiration of the legal detention limits or the issuance of judicial release orders.

At least 16 human rights defenders were documented among the defendants referred to trial, including 10 defenders held in pretrial detention pending trial. All detained defenders were subjected to prolonged pretrial detention in violation of the law. By way of example, but not limitation, human rights lawyer Ibrahim Metwally has spent more than eight years in pretrial detention since his arrest in September 2017. Translator

Marwa Arafa has likewise spent more than five years in pretrial detention since her arrest on 20 April 2020. Human rights lawyer Hoda Abdel Moniem has also exceeded seven years in detention since her arrest on 1 November.

A number of defenders were also subjected to case rotation into other cases. For example, human rights lawyer Osama Bayoumi was arrested on 30 January 2022 and subjected to enforced disappearance until he appeared before the State Security Prosecution on 3 February 2022 in connection with Supreme State Security Case No. 640 of 2018. A release order was issued in his favor on 15 April 2023, but it was never implemented, and he was subsequently rotated into Supreme State Security Case No. 1096 of 2022, Supreme State Security Case No. 1222 of 2022, and Supreme State Security Case No. 2976 of 2022.

Despite the absence of reliable evidence in the case files concerning the alleged terrorist activity, the authorities have relied solely on National Security investigations. Most defendants were investigated only once, at the beginning of their appearance before the State Security Prosecution. The investigations largely focused on their social, political, and religious background, whether they engaged in political or religious activities, details regarding their family members and relatives, and the main milestones of their lives from birth until their appearance before the Public Prosecution, without addressing the nature of the alleged offense. The prosecution merely presented accusations without confronting them with material evidence substantiating those allegations, apart from intelligence memoranda and office-based investigation reports. This confirms that the Egyptian authorities are prosecuting them solely because of their human rights work.

Although the new Criminal Procedure Law reduced the maximum periods of pretrial detention to four months in misdemeanors instead of six months, twelve months in felonies instead of eighteen months, and eighteen months where the prescribed penalty is life imprisonment or death instead of two years, most of the individuals covered by this report were nevertheless subjected to prolonged pretrial detention in violation of the law. Rather than releasing them, most were referred to trial before terrorism circuits, in a new cycle of persecution targeting human rights defenders and dissenting voices, aimed at ensuring that they remain in detention for the longest possible period.

## Section Three: Trial Before Terrorism Circuits: Lacking the Most Basic Fair Trial Guarantees

This section sheds light on the referral of human rights defenders to trial before terrorism circuits, amid the expansion by the State Security Prosecution, since 1 September 2024 of referring politically motivated cases to trial before terrorism circuits.

Terrorism circuits were established at the end of 2013. With the continuous increase in the prosecution of political opponents and opinion activists, their investigation before the State Security Prosecution, and the consideration of their detention renewal hearings before criminal courts in relation to criminal charges, the President of the Cairo Court of Appeal issued a decision on 23 December 2013 establishing terrorism circuits consisting of six chambers. On 25 December 2013, the Minister of Justice approved the decision of the President of the Court of Appeal and increased the number of circuits to eight: six criminal court circuits in Cairo and two in Giza. This was done in the absence of a legislative basis and in violation of Article 217 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which stipulates that jurisdiction is determined by the place where the crime occurred, the place where the accused resides, or the place where the accused is arrested, and that these three locations are of equal weight in establishing the court's jurisdiction to hear a case, with no preference among them. This continued until the issuance of the Counterterrorism Law, Article 50 of which stipulated the "establishment of circuits within criminal courts, each presided over by a judge of the rank of President of a Court of Appeal, to hear felony cases involving terrorist crimes," thereby providing legal legitimacy to the terrorism circuits, particularly given that such provisions are procedural rather than substantive in nature.

### • Terrorism Circuits Held Inside Police Facilities

Terrorism circuits are held inside police facilities, although the principle is that court hearings should be conducted in designated court premises. However, since their establishment, terrorism circuits have consistently convened within police facilities, inside a closed security environment under the supervision of law enforcement personnel. Although this arrangement is based on an administrative decision by the competent authority, it causes the court to be perceived as being closer to the prosecuting authority than to an independent judicial bench and creates an impression

of a lack of impartiality. Furthermore, the public is barred from attending all trial sessions, undermining the principle of public hearings. Only lawyers are permitted to attend the proceedings.

As for the courtrooms themselves, defendants are separated from their lawyers by double iron cages reinforced with bars and visual obstructions, surrounded by soundproof glass barriers that prevent defendants from hearing the proceedings taking place during the hearings.

#### • **Stability of the Composition of Terrorism Circuits in Egypt**

The continued stability of the composition of terrorism circuits over successive years, without the effective application of the principle of periodic judicial rotation, raises a few issues related to fair trial guarantees, foremost among them the principles of impartiality and the natural judge.

The judicial system is fundamentally based on the independence and impartiality of judges and on guaranteeing every defendant the right to appear before their natural judge without exception or discrimination. The judicial system also ordinarily relies on annual mechanisms for the distribution of work, the formation of judicial circuits, and the rotation and transfer of judges through the general assemblies of courts at the beginning of each judicial year.

However, the continued assignment of politically motivated cases or cases related to terrorism charges to specific judicial formations for many years raises objective concerns regarding the entrenchment of judicial tendencies and creates a general perception of insufficient judicial rotation. This negatively affects the confidence of litigants and public opinion in the impartiality of the court.

#### • **Judicial Congestion and Its Impact on Justice**

Terrorism circuits are currently held within the Badr Prison Complex and consist of two first-instance criminal circuits and one criminal appellate circuit. These circuits are experiencing severe case congestion due to the referral of a large number of cases to them and the limited number of circuits available. This raises the question of whether such a situation can genuinely guarantee a fair trial or whether it results in a form of justice constrained by congestion, haste, or delay.

The severe accumulation of cases before a limited number of circuits is likely to negatively affect the effective realization of fair trial guarantees, as it may reduce the time available for the consideration of each case and limit the ability of the defense to adequately present its arguments and pleadings, thereby undermining the principle of equality between the prosecution and the defense.

In addition, this concentration affects the right to have cases determined within a reasonable time, which is one of the essential elements of a fair trial. Delays resulting from case congestion cannot be administratively justified at the expense of defendants' rights, particularly given that these cases involve prolonged arbitrary detention for many defendants.

- **Performance of Terrorism Circuits in Detention Renewal Hearings for Referred Cases**

The performance of the terrorism circuits demonstrates a violation of the guarantee that a defendant is presumed innocent. International treaties and conventions, as well as the Egyptian Constitution, guarantee the right to a fair trial, including the principle that an accused person is innocent until proven guilty in a lawful trial that affords the guarantees necessary for their defense. The presumption of innocence extends to every individual, whether a suspect or an accused person, and applies throughout all stages of criminal proceedings and throughout their duration, regardless of how long such proceedings may take. Judicial determinations should always be based on the court's own assessment of the facts of the case and the evidence contained in its files, without being bound by the views of either the Public Prosecution or the defense.

Examining the performance of the criminal circuits before which these cases have been referred for trial, particularly during detention renewal hearings in recent years, and according to statistics issued by human rights organizations, reveals that during 2025 the two terrorism circuits issued only 10 release orders in the final quarter of the year. During that period, the two circuits reviewed no fewer than 21,802 detention renewal decisions across 78 sessions, covering 2,206 State Security cases, without issuing a single release order for any defendant until October 2025.

Likewise, in 2024, not a single release order was issued for any defendant appearing before these circuits, which issued approximately 45,965 detention renewal orders during 104 sessions covering 3,217 State Security cases.

As for 2023, the terrorism circuits issued only 3 release orders during 127 detention renewal sessions involving 3,140 cases, while issuing 35,966 detention renewal orders. Finally, in 2022, the terrorism circuits issued 353 release orders during 141 detention renewal sessions involving 2,294 cases, while issuing 25,034 detention renewal orders.

This raises serious doubts regarding the impartiality and neutrality of the terrorism judges, particularly given the apparent position adopted by these circuits of refusing to release defendants. Such a pattern suggests a predisposition against defendants in politically motivated cases and a prior assumption of the validity of the allegations contained in the case files and of the defendants' guilt, without objective examination of the cases or scrutiny of the evidence. This casts a shadow over their impartiality and undermines the confidence of litigants and their lawyers, who have come to view these courts with suspicion after they have appeared to depart from the principles of neutrality and independence.

Although pretrial detention is intended to be an exceptional measure justified only by the necessities of investigation and subject to strict safeguards regarding both reasoning and duration, practical application indicates that prolonged renewal of detention has become the norm, to the extent that it effectively functions as a concealed punishment imposed before the issuance of a final judicial ruling. This practice is also inconsistent with international standards, which affirm that pretrial detention should not be the general rule and that every detained person has the right to be tried within a reasonable period or released.

In light of the foregoing, it becomes clear that the referral of human rights defenders to trial before terrorism circuits cannot be separated from the broader framework of using exceptional legislation and criminal justice mechanisms to address politically motivated cases. This pattern of referral reflects a trend toward expanding the application of counterterrorism laws to encompass activities associated with the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, raising serious questions regarding the compatibility of these practices with fair trial guarantees and the principles of the natural judge and judicial independence.

Furthermore, the concentration of such cases before specific circuits, within an exceptional procedural environment, reinforces concerns regarding judicial impartiality and the right to equality of arms between the parties to litigation. Consequently, the continuation of this approach is likely to further intensify restrictions on human rights work and limit the ability of human rights defenders to carry out their legitimate roles within a legal and procedural framework that is becoming increasingly restrictive toward civic space.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This report demonstrates that the persecution faced by human rights defenders in Egypt is no longer limited to isolated or exceptional measures but rather represents a recurring and systematic pattern based on the use of legal frameworks—particularly counterterrorism laws—to target legitimate activities related to freedom of expression and human rights work.

The analysis of cases during the period from September 2024 to December 2025 showed that referral to trial before terrorism circuits, prolonged pretrial detention, and the recycling of cases constitute key mechanisms for keeping defenders in detention for extended periods, even in the absence of sufficient material evidence and with primary reliance on National Security investigations.

The report also shows that the trial environment before terrorism circuits lacks fair trial guarantees, whether in terms of holding hearings inside security facilities, the restrictions imposed on communication between defendants and their lawyers, or the limited number of release orders issued, raising serious concerns regarding respect for the principles of judicial impartiality and independence.

The impact of these practices does not stop at the individuals targeted; rather, it extends to affect civil society. They have led to the reduction of human rights organizations' activities, the spread of self-censorship, and the departure of a few defenders from the country or their withdrawal from human rights work, thereby weakening accountability mechanisms and limiting the ability to document violations.

Accordingly, the report recommends the following:

The release of human rights defenders detained because of their peaceful work or the exercise of their fundamental rights; an end to the use of pretrial detention as a punitive measure; the termination of the practice of “case recycling” (tadweer); and the prohibition of re-charging individuals with the same accusations after release orders have been issued or after the expiration of their detention periods.

An end to the referral of human rights defenders to terrorism circuits and the guarantee of their appearance before their natural judge; ensuring public hearings; and enabling defendants to communicate effectively with their lawyers without physical or technical barriers that impede such communication.

**The review and amendment of all legislation to ensure compliance with international law and the Egyptian Constitution, and the amendment of the Law Regulating Civil Society Work in a manner that guarantees the freedom and independence of civil society organizations.**

**The opening of independent and transparent investigations into incidents of enforced disappearance, torture, and ill-treatment, ensuring accountability for those responsible for such violations and preventing impunity, while enabling victims to access remedies and reparations.**

**The lifting of travel bans, and asset-freezing measures imposed on human rights defenders in the absence of final judicial rulings; the cessation of informal security summonses and extralegal surveillance practices; and the ending of the targeting of the families of human rights defenders as a means of exerting pressure on them.**