

EGYPT: UPR OUTCOMES

20 March 2015

Mr. President,

ARTICLE 19 and the Association for Free Thought and Expression (AFTE) note Egypt's engagement with the UPR process during its recent second Review.

However, this expressed commitment to human rights is in stark contrast to reality, where an unprecedented crackdown on fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression continues.

We thank Lithuania for its recommendation to “investigate all cases of the use of excessive force against protesters [...] and hold accountable those responsible”. Approximately 1000 protesters were killed in a single day, in August 2013, when the Egyptian government employed lethal force against protesters. At present, none of the high-level officials responsible for the massacre have been held accountable. Excessive use of force continues to be employed by Egyptian police, with at least 20 people killed during protests on the anniversary of the revolution, in January 2015.

We highlight that several Members States¹ recommended the repeal or significant amending of the Protest Law, adopted in November 2013. The law severely restricts the right to peaceful assembly and provides broad and sweeping powers to the police to prohibit meetings or demonstrations and to disperse them using lethal force.

We highlight the recommendation made by Austria to “release and drop charges against media workers arrested in the context of performing their duties.”² While ARTICLE 19 and AFTE welcome the release of the three Al Jazeera journalists, after more than 400 days of imprisonment, the charges against the journalists have not been dropped. They remain at risk of re-imprisonment for undertaking their legitimate journalistic activities. Furthermore, at least 10 other journalists remain in prison in Egypt.

We especially welcome recommendations³ that recognise “the crucial importance [...] of civil society” as “indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies”, as stated in Resolution 24/21. We underline, in particular, Chile's recommendation to “lift the restrictions hindering the work of civil society organizations, in particular the reception of funding to effectively carry out their work in defence of human rights.” New and extreme pressures, contrary to a flourishing and enabling environment are being exerted on civil society organisations. These measures include changes to the penal code in September 2014, which criminalise the receipt of foreign funding.

In a recent interview for an online German news outlet President Sisi said that human rights should not be reduced to freedom of expression. We would like to remind Egypt and all Member States that freedom of expression is the cornerstone of democracy, and its fulfilment enables the enjoyment of all other rights. With the revolution in 2011, the Egyptian people clearly expressed their desire for fundamental rights and freedoms. We urge Member States to listen carefully to the voices of *all* Egyptians and take proactive steps to ensure that Egypt fulfils commitments made during its UPR.

Thank you.

¹ ARTICLE 19 and AFTE welcome recommendations made by Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, and USA regarding the Protest Law (also known as the Assembly Law) ensuring legislation does not unduly restrict freedom of assembly and association,

² ARTICLE 19 and AFTE welcome recommendations on protection of journalists and media freedom made by Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway

³ ARTICLE 19 and AFTE welcome recommendations regarding an enabling and flourishing environment for CSOs made by Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Norway, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Spain, UK