



[El-Sisi Regime in Egypt Arrests Members of a Prominent Human Rights Group](#)

The Egyptian government under strongman President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has continued its brutal crackdown on civil rights in the country, most recently arresting three members of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). The move came in the aftermath of European diplomats meeting with the EIPR for a briefing on the nation's human rights situation back in early November. Mohammed Basheer, the group's office manager, Karim Ennarah, director of criminal justice, and Gasser Abdel Razek, the executive director, were all taken into custody on baseless charges in the span of less than a week. The U.S. State Department strongly condemned the arrests, as did Antony Blinken – President-elect Joe Biden's choice to be the next secretary of state for the incoming administration. During the ongoing rule of el-Sisi, the regime has jailed tens of thousands of political prisoners, imposed new restrictions on civil liberties, and expanded the powers of Egyptian security forces. Rights groups estimate that there are around 60,000 detainees which include journalists, activists, academics, and lawyers, among others.

This latest series of arrests is especially concerning considering that EIPR is one of Egypt's most respected and prominent human rights organizations. Observers note that if members of this particular group can be at risk of unjust detainment, then no civil rights entity is safe from the ruthless whims of the current regime. Furthermore, it is worrying that the scope of the el-Sisi administration's targets has not been merely limited to political opponents or threats, but has instead also included non-political forces such as bloggers, journalists, and activists – demonstrating the degree to which his government has attempted to repress any form of civil society. In most cases, these groups are charged with bogus crimes related to terrorism – which are used in an effort to try and sell the major “threat” they pose to society – and face trials in military courts that are not independent from the regime itself. While imprisoned, these detainees are also often subjected to torture as a means of coercion, in order to obtain a false confession which can be used against them. Overall, since coming to power in 2013, the el-Sisi government has actively worked to enact policies that criminalize even the most basic freedoms of Egyptian citizens.

The decision to detain the activists in this most recent case is clearly related to the briefing that was held between the EIPR and European diplomats regarding the existing human rights situation in Egypt. In that meeting, the EIPR hosted ambassadors and diplomats from a variety of countries including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Canada. The human rights group published photos from the briefing session on its social media pages, and also drew attention to the reasoning behind the gathering. Reports appear to indicate that when arrested, the activists were directly and specifically questioned about the early November meeting with foreign diplomats. It is no coincidence that security forces under el-Sisi initiated this crackdown on the EIPR directly after news of the briefing became widely-known.

During the course of his time in office, outgoing President Trump has repeatedly refused to publicly pressure el-Sisi despite growing concern about his regime's repressive behavior. In fact, Trump infamously referred to el-Sisi as his “favorite dictator” and expressed no issues with the heavy-handed tactics being used by his government to suppress massive protests in Egypt against his rule. Thus, rights groups have accused Trump of emboldening autocrats in the region like el-Sisi but hope that the incoming Biden administration will take a stronger stance against his well-documented abuses. For his part, Biden has previously stated that there will be “no more blank checks for Trump's favorite dictator,” a signaling that the large amount of monetary aid given to Egypt by the United States is subject to the former's government respecting the basic freedoms of civil society groups in the country.