



[Human Rights Watch Accuses the El-Sisi Government of Severely Stifling the Work of Environmental Groups as Egypt Prepares to Host a Global Climate Change Conference in November](#)

Earlier this week, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report detailing various transgressions that the Egyptian government under President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has engaged in against environmental groups within the country. The report is a follow-up to another posted by HRW earlier this year that also expressed concern about Egypt's ability to justly host the 2022 U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP27) because of multiple human rights violations, which expand far beyond the scope of environmental issues alone. In fact, many freedoms, including the right to free speech and the right to assemble, have been curtailed at an increasing rate since El-Sisi took power in 2014. In the report, HRW makes it clear that it is not only possible that free speech rights would be limited at COP27, but that they already have been for years within Egypt. The list of actions taken by the Egyptian government to eliminate dissent is alarming, including measures such as restricted access to funding and research permits, and thousands of politically-motivated arrests. Many belonging to civil society groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have left Egypt altogether, and those that have stayed have completely changed their approaches in order to fall more in line with the government.

Moreover, some of HRW's informants spoke about how the government has actually been supporting some environmental initiatives lately, but only those that serve their interests, such as trash collection and recycling. The topics that are most censored are those that directly accuse the government of wrongdoing, such as poisoning water supplies in attempts to build up tourist infrastructure or the plan to build a new administrative capital which would have a large environmental toll. El-Sisi's government has even removed much of the little remaining green spaces in several of Egypt's major cities, including Cairo, which is notoriously polluted and dry.

Furthermore, there are prior examples of poor human rights-related events in Egypt in past years. In 2019, the same city that is set to host COP27 hosted the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Participants were spied upon and generally restricted from participating free from government oversight. Some delegates were unable to receive visas due to intentional delays, and some were even physically abused by government security forces. Egypt Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry only increased discontent in May when he announced that there would be a designated space for onlookers to voice their opinions adjacent to the meeting hall. The statement led most to believe that protesting would not be allowed outside of that space, which is counter to the essence of such meetings. Shoukry did say that participants would be allowed to witness the discussion within the chamber itself.

Specifically, Human Rights Watch has requested that Egypt do the following: stop harassing civil society groups by lifting restrictions on travel, funding, etc., edit a 2019 law that hinders the right to assemble, end bans on websites, cease surveillance, and issue visas in a timely manner, among other things. HRW has also asked that the U.N. review with other governments their future host sites for the COP. As for Egyptian authorities, the government refuted HRW's findings on Tuesday, although they only denied the notion that the government was intentionally making it difficult to get NGO permits. There was no comment on the crackdown of rights and freedoms which have been highlighted consistently by impartial watchdog groups like HRW and others in recent years.