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As COP27 begins in Sharm el-Sheikh, AOHR hosts expert panel on Egypt's political detainees

Yesterday, Thursday 10 November, Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) hosted another successful webinar, bringing together activists and experts from around the world to discuss the Egyptian regime's ongoing repression of all critical voices in the country.

The webinar was moderated by Mohamed Ismail, human rights defender and coordinator of the Egyptians Abroad for Democracy. He stressed that Egyptians abroad will continue their efforts until all perpetrators of human rights violations in Egypt, led by Abdel Fattah El- Sisi, are brought to Justice.

Ismail listed a number of massacres committed by the Egyptian regime against civilians, including Rabaa al-Adawiya, in which lethal force was used by the regimes forces against demonstrators and sit-ins. Ismail also pointed out that he survived this massacre.

Ismail added that those responsible for these massacres must be held accountable, as a number of human rights NGOs have filed a complaint before the French National Public Prosecutor and the United Nations against both the Egyptian and French government, and requested an investigation to be carried out into the crimes against humanity committed by the Egyptian and French forces on the Egyptian-Libyan border six years ago, which resulted in the extrajudicial execution of a large number of civilians.

Ismail emphasised that the Egyptian regime should have been denied the organisation of the most important global conference "27th Climate Summit" in Sharm el-Sheikh,



since this is seen as is considered a validation of the international community to the violations of the Egyptian regime.

Beginning the discussion, Jim Moran said that while “COP27 is a good thing, it is not a good thing that the al-Sisi government is hosting it – it is an honour to bring the heads of states together to talk about such a critical issue.”

“It gives credibility to General al-Sisi – who is continuing to act like the general who led a military coup”, said Mr. Moran. “1000s of people have been imprisoned. The US did release money when Egypt released 500 of them, but I’m sure those cells were immediately filled with 500 more dissidents.”

The US “has supported Israel and Egypt in tandem since the Sadat agreement [i.e. the Camp David Accords] , and I’m afraid that this is going to continue until there’s some kind of pivot point – perhaps this COP27 will be that pivot point, but I’m not optimistic.”

Dr. Maha Azzam – Chair of Egyptians for Democracy- began by underlining the importance of addressing climate change, stressing that “this requires freedom – freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.”

“In order to save this world, we need to mobilise millions across the world. Why? Because we need to ensure that governments are held accountable. What we’re asking is that the activists in prison [in Egypt] be free; that the 60,000 dissidents who did not receive a free trial be freed.”

“Given the challenge that we face today we need activists and NGOs, we need experts and non-experts, to hold their governments accountable. The Egyptian regime, like others across the world, has made major mistakes in regard to the environment – and yet it cannot be held accountable, in the area of politics, in the arena of corruption. Someone who writes a blog can be picked up and thrown into prison; if you write an article, you will be picked up,” said Dr. Azzam.

“Facing this major threat to humanity, we need journalists to be free to speak out – we don’t have this Egypt”, continued Dr. Azzam.



After saluting “the contributions Egyptians have made to freedom”, Sara Flounders began her contribution by saying that those massacred on Rabaa Square “must be remembered”.

Flounders said that “in my opinion, what we’re seeing is a cynical display [at COP27] of ‘greenwashing’ – great speeches, but there’s no plan for financial aid to developing countries who are on the front line of a warming planet.”

“Rights groups and international organisations are, in holding this meeting, ignoring Egypt’s appalling human rights record, including the detention of 10s of 1000s of political prisoners. Human rights and climate justice – we need to make that connection.”

At COP27, the biggest issue is carbon, “and the biggest polluter today is the US military – it is the elephant in the room”, said Ms. Flounders. “But, everything to do with the US military is exempt from this meeting, so how accurate can the discussions be?”

“The Sisi government’s role in COP is cynical; this is a dictatorship. Before this conference, the most basic demand should have been the release of political prisoners”, said Ms. Flanders.

The last speaker of the evening, Prof. Iyad Afalqa, began by saying that “as someone who was born under Israeli military occupation I have empathy for our sisters and brothers in political detention around the world, and particularly in Egypt.”

Prof. Afalqa said that he was sceptical about the positive role that the US is currently playing in regard to human rights in the Arabic-speaking region. “President Biden recently went to Saudi Arabia for one thing – oil, and bringing the prices of fuel down in the US, and there was very little discussion of [murdered journalist] Jamal Khashoggi.”

“We need to stop arming dictators around the world – this is a double standard on our part. We are enabling these dictators while, on the other hand, asking other countries to adopt our democracy. (...) We should lead by example. We should make sure that oppressive regimes and dictators know we do care about human rights by not giving them a blank cheque.”

“The struggle continues”, concluded Prof. Afalqa.



Dorothy Reik, president of the Progressive Democrats of the Santa Monica Mountains (PDSMM) said that she has worked on the Egyptian file for a period of time, and it is appalling to see this conference being held in Egypt. “I believe that allowing Egypt to host this conference is an international validation of the violations of human rights in Egypt.”

She pointed out that a large part of USA’s economy is unfortunately based on arming dictatorial regimes by the US, which contributes to human rights violations. She also that her party will continue to work against these violations.

AOHR UK would like to take this opportunity to thank all speakers and participants in the webinar, and to extend our solidarity to all those activists who raised their voices in support of Egypt’s political detainees.

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK)