



THE EGYPTIAN NATIONAL ACTION GROUP

ENAG

"I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it"

"We are the Egyptian National Action Group (ENAG) and this is our monthly Brief. Every month, we provide policy makers, academics, activists and journalists with an executive summary on Egyptian affairs along with our position on key topics"

Dr Ayman Nour

Spokesman of the Egyptian National Action Group

Former Presidential candidate

March 2020

BRIEF 3

About the Egyptian National Action Group (ENAG)

The Egyptian National Action Group was launched in December 2019 by **Egyptian political opponents to the Sisi regime of all ideological trends**. It was formed in light of the publication of a **consensus document** developed by most figures of the opposition on the principles and priorities of Egypt's future governance along with a priority list of actions.

The Egypt National Action Group lives by the **values of the Arab Spring**: human dignity, freedom, equality and democracy. Our political differences – we are liberals, leftists, Islamists – are of no importance compared to our common goal which is to set Egypt free.

The Egypt National Action Group believes that **the state of Egypt is on the brink of collapse**.

In full alignment with the consensus document released in December 2019, we agree with the necessity of the removal of the current regime and the release of all political prisoners. We call for:

- **a democratic civil state protected by the rule of law and the independence of the executive, legislative and judicial powers**
- **an enhanced protection of minorities**
- **the full implementation of international laws and covenants for the respect of human rights**
- **the freedom of association and the freedom of speech**
- **the non-interference of any religious institutions in the State affairs and the independence of religious institutions**
- **gender equality and the fight of all type of violence against women**
- **a reconciliation process based on transitional justice**
- **the preservation of the nation's independence.**

The ENAG view on

COVID-19 and Sisi's failure

ENAG condemns the **reckless attitude of the junta which has for too long refused to take the necessary measures** to prevent the virus from spreading and has maintained a **blackout on the real number of cases**. In two press statements released on March 3rd and 11th, ENAG urged the government to close schools and universities as well as to temporarily release prisoners.

Transparency is the least that Egyptians, foreign tourists and Egypt's partners should expect from Sisi's regime during this global crisis. Instead, **the authorities have attempted to deceive the world and its own people**, by [providing unrealistic](#) data; [blaming another country for a specific case](#); and putting foreign nationals in danger with [botched testing](#).

Outrage in Sinai: Dead civilian body mutilated and burned by the army

Following the release of a graphic [video](#) showing a member of the **Egyptian Military Battalion "103 Thunderbolt" mutilating then burning the dead body of a Sinai civilian**, ENAG issued a statement on March 23rd to express **its outrage and its disgust** of such acts and the incomprehensible sense of pride the soldier seems to feel. ENAG urges Sisi to not leave this **war crime** unpunished.

The \$25 billion Russian loan that Egypt cannot afford

Sisi's regime seems determined to go ahead with a **\$25 billion loan from Russia** to build a **nuclear power plant in [Dabaa](#)**, Marsa Matrouh governorate.

On February 28th, ENAG issued a statement ringing the alarm on this loan. Indeed, **this enormous \$25 billion loan is worth 23% of current foreign debt (!) and it is estimated that Egypt presently produces 25% more electricity than it currently needs**. Other power plant projects have been put on hold to avoid worsening the debt burden. Why not this one?

The interest payments of the national debt consume **55% of government revenues**. This leaves very little to spend on the population's needs: education, health care and infrastructure, especially in a country where [60%](#) of the people are either poor or vulnerable.

Anti-terrorism law

The ENAG is **strongly opposed to the new amendments that were recently made to Egypt's already-draconian anti-terrorism law**. There are several worrying new additions to the law but most concerning is the **removal of certain provisions when it comes to designating a person as a terrorist**.

Intention alone is now enough to warrant a terrorist designation, leaving a **gap to interpret and abuse the law as suits the government best**.

In our statement released on March 4th, we point out that this law is now not only **a threat to all Egyptians but also to foreign companies and financial institutions** who could have assets frozen for affiliation with so-called "terrorists".

Osama Morsi in danger

The **physical safety and health of Mohamed Morsi's son Osama Morsi**, who has been imprisoned in Egypt since December 2016 on spurious charges, [has been called into question](#) by the family's lawyer, Toby Cadman from Guernica 37 International Justice chambers.

In a **letter sent to French President Emanuel Macron** by Dr. Ayman Nour, spokesman of ENAG, Dr. Amr Darrag, former Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Ms. Madga Rafea, a political philosophy researcher in Paris and Mr. Yehia Hamed, former Minister of Investment, requesting that he intervene on Osama Morsi's behalf, it is highlighted that **Osama has begun a [hunger strike](#) to protest the newly downgraded conditions of his detention.**

In September 2019, Mohamed Morsi's son Abdullah who was not in prison died of an alleged heart attack, he was 25 at the time.

Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur for extra-judicial killings, described the death of Mohamed Morsi as an ["arbitrary killing"](#).

COVID-19: Egypt at war with transparency

Reporting on COVID-19 figures can now have your **press accreditation revoked, as happened to The Guardian reporter Ruth Michaelson**. [The report in question](#) is based on data used by researchers at the University of Toronto. It says that Egypt's number of cases is likely to amount to around 19,000 people, a figure which is significantly higher than that reported by the government.

The State Information Service (SIS) has also sent a **warning to New York Times reporter Declan Walsh** for his reporting on COVID-19 in the country.

COVID-19: Four women arrested while protesting for the temporary release of prisoners

Four women - **author Ahdaf Soueif, her sister Laila Saouef, activist Mona Seif (all related to Alaa Abdelfattah) and political scientist Rabab El-Mahdi** – were [arrested for holding a small demonstration](#) in central Cairo on March 18th. They were asking the state [to take](#) *"serious steps regarding corona in prisons. As we know... Egypt's prisons are clusters for disease"*.

Ahdaf Soueif, Mona Seif, and Rabab al-Mahdi have now been released however Laila Soueif was only released later after she had started a [hunger and water strike](#).

COVID-19: 31 people including the former President of Tunisia sign a letter to the UN to release prisoners in Egypt

31 people from different countries, including former President of Tunisia and 2011 Nobel Prize laureate have signed an urgent letter to the UN Secretary General asking for action to temporarily release prisoners in Egypt during the COVID-19 outbreak. This letter was also sent to the African Union Chair and Chairperson, to the WHO Director General and Deputy Director General, to the EU High Representative Josep Borrell-Fontelles, to the French President Macron, to the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, to the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and to the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Only one case has officially been announced amongst the Egyptian prison population however in a [letter leaked from Al-Aqrab prison](#), it is revealed that there are significantly more cases. The prisoners have received no assistance and no measure to stop the spreading have been taken.

Iran, which has similar prison conditions to Egypt, just released 85,000 prisoners to control the spread of COVID-19, following a directive from the UN.

28 year-old Bologna University student and human rights activist Patrick Zaky moved to Al-Aqrab prison – latest hearing cancelled

The hearing session for Patrick Zaky, which was due to be held on March 23rd was cancelled as it was on March 16th. The reason given was that prisoners could not be transported. [A visit ban has also been extended.](#) The family and relatives of Patrick have no way to know how he is.

Mubarak given hero's burial

The **funeral of Hosni Mubarak** was held on February 26th, one month after the anniversary of the 2011 revolution which removed him from power. Many in Egypt, including the ENAG, saw this as an attempt by Sisi to show that the 2011 Revolution was now also dead.

Mubarak was given **a full military honours** at his funeral. His lawyer publicly [stated that](#) "This is evidence that president Sisi is loyal and wise". His burial is especially striking **when compared to that of President Mohamed Morsi who was [swiftly buried and denied public mourning.](#)**

The ENAG stresses that the Revolution is not dead, and the spirit of 2011 remains strong amongst many Egyptians.

Mass execution in the 2017 Church attacks case

The **Eight civilians were concurrently executed following a sham trial in relation to the 2017 attacks on Coptic churches.** The "confessions" which were used to sentence them were obtained under torture and should not have been valid in a court of law. [Several of the defendants were also forcefully disappeared for a period.](#)

There are nine other defendants who are awaiting execution, which could happen any day.

Watch for

Several campaigns have been launched to get the prisoners released – how will it result?

Campaigns to release the prisoners in Egypt have multiplied. On top of the letter sent to the UN or the protest organized by Alaa Abdelfattah's family mentioned above, organisations such as [We Record](#), Batel or Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have all campaigned to save the lives of the prisoners. **This is a particularly anxious time for the families as hearings and visitations have been banned.** This means that they cannot communicate at all with their relatives.

At the time of publishing this Brief, only 15 prisoners have been released so far. As a reminder, there are more than 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt.

Read

EIS Report on Coronavirus and economic consequences

[A brief yet comprehensive piece by Ahmed Zikrallah](#) was released by the Egyptian Institute for Studies on the **potential dramatic economic consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak**. It warns of the high dependency of Egypt on external factors on which it has no influence. Indeed, Egypt is mostly a **rentier economy** and depends on now diving revenues from the Suez Canal, tourism, oil and gas exports or the remittances of the Egyptian expatriates (which constitutes 8.8% of the GDP). The report also addresses the risks of seeing **Gulf countries' financial support drastically reduce along with foreign investments and loans**. It also covers the Egyptian Stock Exchange's dive and the gloomy future of the Egyptian Pound.

A difficult Must-Read: torture of children in Egyptian prison

The HRW and Belady have co-signed a chilling report [called "No one cared he was a child"](#) which shares the **testimonies of children who have endured torture, enforced disappearance and many other forms of abuse in the hands of the Egyptian regime**. It tells the stories of children as young as 12 when they were tortured (electroshocks, beatings, suspended in the air...), held in solitary or in overcrowded cells with adults.

Oppression and humiliation testimonies from Egyptian prisons

Another paper published this month by the Egyptian Institute for Studies is the very vivid [report by Emad Sami](#) on the **humiliating process in Egyptian prisons**. The major strength of this report is **the testimonies of both male and female former prisoners**.

Former prisoner Mohamed Soltan joined the plea to release prisoners

In a moving [Op-Ed](#) in the Washington Post, Mohamed Soltan whose father has been detained since 2013 as a political prisoner **recalls the inhumane conditions in which himself was detained, the unimaginable promiscuity in which prisoners live and the medical negligence they suffer**. He calls Sisi to release the most vulnerable prisoners.

For any questions or to unsubscribe, please write to albane@a2r-globalcomms.co