

## Egypt | Advocates for Egypt's street children face unjust imprisonment

The undersigned political parties and NGOs call for the release of Aya Hijazi, her husband Mohammed Hassanein, and their six colleagues ahead of the court's scheduled verdict on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. The defendants have been held in provisional detention since 2014 in connection with the Belady Foundation for Street Children case. The defendants' continued imprisonment on the basis of fabricated charges is indicative of the government's continued crackdown on youth initiatives as well its suppression of volunteerism, civic activism, and freedom of association.

The street children initiative was part of the larger Belady- Island of Humanity project, based on non-partisan, youth-based humanitarianism; launched by Aya Hijazi and her husband Mohammed Hassanein after January 25, 2011. Due to the Ministry of Social Solidarity and security authorities' refusal to grant the Belady Foundation a license, in contravention of Law 84/2002 regulating civic associations, the defendants were charged with illegally running a civic association through an unlicensed entity.

Although they were cleared by forensic medical reports of the most serious charges leveled against them including torture, and sexual abuse and molestation, the defendants continue to be held for nearly three years in provisional detention – exceeding the legal limits - without any genuine trial proceedings until the last couple of months. In addition, the notarized statements of volunteers and other defense witnesses who frequented the foundation's offices confirm that the children received humane and dignified treatment, were present in a known location, and were seen during visits by family members and volunteers. The miscarriage of justice in this case has resulted in numerous local and international appeals for the defendants' release.

The undersigned political parties and NGOs call for the acquittal and immediate release of Hijazi and Hassanein as well as their six colleagues Sherif Talat Mohammed, Amira Farag, Ibrahim Abd al-Rabbih, Karim Magdi, and Mohammed al-Sayyed Mohammed. Egypt's future depends on youth who are actively engaged in addressing challenges to building a prosperous society. The endemic crisis of street children in Cairo is so daunting that the state has called for dedicated youth efforts in addressing it. Paradoxically, the government has penalized the young people and others working at the Belady Foundation for providing services to street children that the state has long conceded it is unable to provide on its own. The undersigned organizations caution that the state's repressive policies are a clear threat to the future of Egypt.

## **Signatories:-**

### **From Political Parties:**

- Bread and Freedom Party
- Egyptian Popular Current
- Women and Freedoms Committees in Egyptian Social Democratic Party

### **From NGOs:**

1. Nazra for Feminist Studies
2. ADALAH Center for Rights & Freedoms (ACRF)
3. Al-Haqqanya Foundation of Rights and Freedoms
4. Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies
5. Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
6. Arab Penal Reform Organization
7. Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE)
8. Bent Al-Ard Association in Mansoura
9. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
10. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA)
11. Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF)
12. El-Nadeem Centre for combating Violence and Torture Haby
13. Center for Environmental Rights Heliopolis
14. Center for Political Development and Human Rights Research
15. Hisham Mubarak Law Center
16. Masryoon Against Religious Discrimination
17. Salma for Women Development
18. The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement
19. The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR)
20. The Egyptian Observatory for Training and Consultation
21. The Human Rights Legal Assistance Group