

**From May 3, 2014 to February 3, 2016:
22 months in pretrial detention on charges carrying a life
sentence: the penalty for a youth initiative to address the
tragedy of street children in Egypt**

25 Rights groups: The Belady Foundation case demonstrates that individual and community initiatives face only repression and fabricated charges

The undersigned organizations strongly condemn the ongoing pretrial detention of Aya Hegazy, her husband Mohammed Hassanein, and five others—Sherif Talaat Mohammed, Amira Farag, Ibrahim Abd Rabbo, Karim Magdi, and Mohammed al-Sayyed Mohammed—for 650 days in connection with the Belady Foundation for Street Children. This is yet another example of the continued suppression of volunteer action and the quashing of youth and civil society initiatives. The undersigned organizations demand that all persons held in connection with the case be released and all charges against them dropped.

On February 13, 2016, the fourth session of the trial will take place. The first trial session was held on March 14, 2015. During the past two sessions the defense was unable to make arguments. As a result, the trial was postponed on procedural grounds, while the defendants have remained in custody for 22 months without any justification, but simply as means to harass them and prolong their detention.

Police forces raided the offices of the Belady Foundation, located on Mohammed Mahmoud Street, on the evening of May 1, 2014 pursuant to a complaint that was filed subsequent to the forced entry of a man who alleged that his missing son had been held in the office for more than 15 days. The complainant had come to the office with a large group of thugs an hour before the raid in search of his son. Not finding him, he left after vandalizing the office and promising revenge against those in charge of the initiative. Those with the complainant assaulted persons present in the office, who called for police assistance more than 15 times to no avail. Less than an hour later, the complainant returned in the company of a force from the Abdeen police station. They searched the premises without a warrant from the prosecution and arrested Hegazy, her husband, and two other volunteers present, as well as 17 children who were on the premises at the time of the raid. Computers and documents were also seized from the office, which was sealed. A few days later, police raided the home of Hegazy and her husband, confiscated some of their personal belongings and identification documents, and sealed the home as well. At a later time, the prosecution's investigation broadened to include other volunteers with the initiative and two friends of Mohammed Hassanein who had no involvement with the Foundation. The Central Cairo Plenary Prosecution referred all eight defendants to the Abdeen court on September 8, 2014 in case 4252/2014/felonies.

The defendants were detained in an undisclosed location until interrogations began on the night of May 3, 2014 at the Central Cairo Plenary Prosecution. The prosecution leveled seven primary charges against the defendants. According to the referral order , these charges included: establishing and operating a criminal group with the purpose of human trafficking; sexually assaulting children using force, violence, threat, kidnapping, fraud, and deception against the children; sexually exploiting children in the filming of pornographic materials; participating in demonstrations; collecting donations; detaining children in a private location; physically torturing children; and assaulting children to compel them to take part in lewd conduct and sex.

Most of these charges were disproved by the forensic report to the prosecution, which found no signs that any of the children had been tortured or sexually assaulted. Witness statements from volunteers and visitors to the foundation premises, certified by the notary public office, also stated that the children were treated humanely and honorably.

In addition, measures had already been taken since December 2013 to register the Belady Foundation as a civic association under the Ministry of Social Solidarity. The Foundation had followed the required procedures and opened a bank account, but five months of bureaucratic and security red tape had prevented the Foundation from obtaining an official registration number before the incident. The Ministry of Social Solidarity later stated in an official letter to the Foundation that it was freezing the registration process pending the outcome of the case and would examine the Foundation's objectives in its notification document. The ministry refused to give defense lawyers the Foundations' file, which proved that it had completed most of the procedures required for registration and was on the cusp of receiving its registration number. The attorneys submitted an official request for the ministry file to the court.

It is worth noting that the Ministry of Social Solidarity and security agencies' restrictive approach to granting the Belady Foundation its registration number violates Law No. 84/2002 on Associations and Foundations. This law grants foundations or associations the right to start working as long as the latter has not received any statement of rejection from the ministry on the registration process during 60 days from the date of filing the application. According to the law the foundation or association should receive its registration number after this period. Such a restrictive approach with regard to Belady has led to the allegations that it is practicing activities as an unregistered entity in the field of foundations/ associations without following the rules of the law.

Our Street Children, a project sponsored by "Belady: Humanitarian Island," is a youth initiative launched by Hegazy, Hassanein, and others after January 25, 2011 that seeks to serve society and its development through the efforts of young people, divorced from any political orientation or affiliation. It began in January 2013 with an initiative to collect trash and clean up the streets, after which Hassanein established the Belady Company for Beautification and Cleanliness. It was followed by Knights Against Harassment, which sought to resist sexual harassment in public squares. The group also organized athletic events to foster harmony among all ages and social currents, seen in the [Run from Politics](#) marathon, organized by Belady on December 31, 2013 with

the approval of the Interior Ministry. Several [public figures](#) took part and the event was widely celebrated in the [public](#) and [private](#) media. The idea for Our Street Children came in early 2014. The initiative aimed to provide street children with education, art, and sport and foster their creativity, talents, and capacities. The initiative received plaudits from the community and the [media](#) as an exemplar of volunteerism and [youth initiative](#).

Although most of the charges against Hegazy and her colleagues at the association are criminal charges—used to defame the Foundation—the Interior Ministry and the media have portrayed the group as a gang operating to recruit children for demonstrations against the army and police. Violating the law and professional ethics, the Interior Ministry allowed media outlets to tape interviews with children and question them about their involvement in demonstrations and chants against the army and police, allegedly incited by officials at the Foundation.

The Belady case demonstrates how youth continue to be punished and face fabricated charges. It is an illustration of the policy of suppressing freedom of association and civic and volunteer action. The undersigned organizations thus reiterate their appeal for the release of all defendants in the case and the dropping of all charges. We also urge the state and competent bodies to enable the young people of the Belady Foundation to pursue their goal of eliminating a serious phenomenon that the state has long argued it is unable to combat alone, requiring dedicated youth energies to assist it. We caution that such repressive policies, especially when wielded against youth, constitute a clear threat to the future of this country.

Signatory Organizations:

1. Nazra for Feminist Studies
2. ADALAH Center for Rights & Freedoms “ACRF”
3. Alhaqanya Foundation of Rights and freedoms
4. Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies
5. Appropriate Communications Techniques for Development (ACT)
6. Arab Network for Human Rights Information
7. Arab Penal Reform Organization
8. Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression
9. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
10. Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance
11. Egyptian Commission for rights and freedoms
12. El-Nadeem Centre for the rehabilitation of victims of violence and torture
13. Foundation Of The Victims Of Abduction And Forced Disappearance
14. Habi Center for Environmental Rights
15. Hesham Mobarak Law Center
16. Masryoon Against Religious Discrimination
17. National group for human rights and law
18. The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement
19. The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights
20. The Egyptian Center for Public Policy Studies
21. The Egyptian Coalition for the Rights of the Child
22. The Egyptian Foundation for the Advancement of Childhood Conditions
23. The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
24. The Land Center for Human Rights
25. The New Woman Foundation