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Egypt

The popular struggle against the Sissi regime intensifies

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In Egypt, recent months have seen a continuation and even a rise of popular protests against the dictatorship of the Sissi regime. On April 25, a demonstration called especially by democratic and progressive forces in Egypt was severely repressed by the security services of the Egyptian military regime. This followed the sale of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia, in violation of the Egyptian constitution, an act which mobilized thousands of protesters in the streets that day under the slogan "Egypt is not for sale."

For several weeks hundreds of activists had been arrested and imprisoned, including lawyer and activist Haitham Mohamedain, a member of the Revolutionary Socialists movement. The central area of Cairo was blocked. Police deployed systematic violence against demonstrators prior to arresting hundreds of them. Many journalists were arrested.

It did not stop there. The satirical group *Atfal Shawarea* (Street Children) –some of whom are still adolescents - were arrested this week. The charges against them include "inciting a revolt against the government, forming a group to challenge the principles of the state and state authority, and dissemination of false information that disturbs the public peace". *Atfal Shawarea* published several videos using humour and acapella singing to comment on the situation in the country, also being critical of certain policies of the state. Nearly 300,000 people followed them on their Facebook page. On Saturday May 14, more than 150 protesters were also sentenced to two years in prison for participating in the rallies on April 25.

Meanwhile, attacks against civil society are intensifying: NGO members risk 25 years in prison for allegedly receiving money from abroad; the regime wants to silence the voices that denounce the repression. Independent trade unions are also the target of the repression of the regime. The International Labour Organization published a statement at the beginning of May criticizing the continuing repression in Egypt of independent trade unions and of freedom of association for workers. The actions of the Sissi regime against unions include trials before an administrative court, aiming to ban and dissolve independent unions and federations, legislative threats in Parliament against the fundamental trade-union rights of representatives of the state –controlled union confederation (the ETUF) and the appointment as new Minister of Labour of Mohamed Saafan, a functionary of the ETUF who opposes the freedom of trade unions to organize.

The recently arrested activists join the tens of thousands of political prisoners and the hundreds of victims of "enforced disappearances" in recent years, not forgetting the massacre of Rabia Square (August 2013) which killed more than a thousand supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Security forces arrested 11,877 people accused of being members of "terrorist groups" between January and the end of September 2015, according to the Deputy Minister of Public Security at the Interior Ministry. The repression targets mainly alleged members or supporters of the movements of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also many democratic and progressive opponents of the Sissi regime. The authorities had already indicated that they had arrested at least 22,000 people for similar reasons in 2014. In a number of cases, the prisoners in political cases have been held in prolonged detention without charge or trial. At the end of 2015, at least 700 people had been held in custody for more than two years without having been convicted by a court.

At least 3,000 civilians have been unjustly tried before military courts, accused of "terrorism" and on other charges citing "political violence." Many, including the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders were tried in mass trials. It must be pointed out that trying civilians in military courts is fundamentally unjust.

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Many campaigns involving hunger strikes and different forms of resistance have nevertheless taken place. In particular there are many examples of political prisoners protesting against their detention and the conditions in which they are being held, as in March 2016 when dozens of prisoners in Aqrab prison went on hunger strike.

The struggle of Egyptians to defend their democratic and social rights continues. Strikes have increased in recent weeks, by nurses and metal workers in particular, who are fighting for better wages and working conditions.

More than 3,000 Egyptian journalists also demonstrated their anger in the streets of Cairo at the beginning of May following the arrest of opposition journalists. They demanded the resignation of the Interior Minister.

Nevertheless European leaders are intensifying their collaboration with Cairo: arms sales, security cooperation and campaigns promoting investment...

As the revolutionaries in Egypt sang: "Free men and women and revolutionaries, we continue the struggle."

Solidarity with Political Prisoners in Egypt!

Down with the military regime!

Long live the revolution for freedom, social justice and equality!

May 15, 2016