

His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad Bande
President of the UN General Assembly for the 74th session

21 November 2019

Your Excellency,

Our organisations urge you to reconsider the appointment of Egypt as co-facilitator for consultations with Member States on the review of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy (GCTS) next year. This is essential to prevent the further erosion of respect and protection of human rights in the context of countering terrorism, and to safeguard the integrity of the GCTS, in particular its human rights pillar.

Egypt is pursuing a strategy to undermine human rights protections through reframing the UN approach to human rights and terrorism. It has steadily been seeking to shift focus away from the current focus on prevention and redress of human rights violations while countering terrorism and the human rights of victims of terrorism, and towards the ‘effects of terrorism’ with an emphasis on more diffuse impacts of terrorism on State institutions and the economy. Developments over the last twelve months demonstrate that the strategy of containment being utilised by other delegations is failing. Instead, treating Egypt as a normal and trusted partner on counter-terrorism and human rights matters is empowering Egypt to reverse normative human rights progress achieved over years of careful consensus building, and enabling it to prevent institutional strengthening through continually escalating demands.

Egypt has sought to dilute and distort the scope of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, and distract its work, under the constant threat of creating a competing mandate on “effects of terrorism”. While Egypt’s attempts to take shared control of the mandate renewal at the 40th HRC Session in March were ultimately unsuccessful, Mexico and other States then partially acquiesced as a result of Egyptian threats at the 42nd HRC Session in September, resulting in another deeply problematic merged [HRC resolution 42/18](#) on “terrorism and human rights.” Concessions in the resolution gave further prominence to the Egyptian approach, specifically “inviting” the Special Rapporteur to make recommendations on the “negative effects” of terrorism.

These concessions were made notwithstanding the present mandate-holder outlining [her concerns](#) that the “effects of terrorism” initiative has a history of “instrumentalising the victims of terrorism in order to bolster the need for greater counter-terrorism measures and thus weaken the international system as a whole.” Even with a stronger focus on the rights of victims of terrorism in the mandate renewal resolution, [Egypt expressed dissatisfaction](#), making clear that their focus is not on victims or on human rights, but on broader economic issues outside of the human rights mandates of either the HRC or Third Committee.

Egypt’s international campaign must be understood in the context of President Sisi’s egregious and continuing abuse of counter-terrorism measures at home to suppress civil society and dissenting

voices. [In a statement on 18 October](#), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights raised concerns at the detention and mistreatment of human rights defenders Esraa Abdelfattah, Mohammed El-Baqer, and Alaa Abdel Fattah, accused of “terrorism” solely for the exercise of their rights to peaceful protest and freedom of expression. Their cases are emblematic of Egypt’s frequent abuse of counter-terrorism charges and measures against human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, peaceful protesters and political opponents, [free media](#), [including online](#), [civil society](#), and others, including prolonged [arbitrary detentions](#), [enforced disappearances](#), [torture and ill-treatment](#) including by rape, and [extrajudicial or arbitrary executions](#), including [mass killings of peaceful protesters](#). [Egypt has legislated to facilitate impunity for military officers for these crimes](#), some of which [may even constitute crimes against humanity](#). The [latest statement of concern](#) from UN experts was issued only days ago. The UN Secretary General’s 2019 [report on cooperation with the UN system](#) contain numerous instances in which the Egyptian government engaged in reprisals, including through the abuse of counter-terrorism laws. Moreover, reprisals relating to a 2018 UN expert country visit prompted special procedures to [publicly proclaim](#) that Egypt is not ready to receive further visits. Egypt has used travel bans to stop its nationals engaging with the UPR process, indicative of its stance on civil society participation.

Egypt has a clear vested interest in undermining international human rights law and accountability mechanisms relating to violations committed in the context of counter-terrorism measures. For States to treat Egypt as a reliable partner in co-facilitating the review of the GCTS only further enables Egypt to perpetuate this egregious pattern, with serious consequences on the lives and dignity of Egyptians seeking to exercise their fundamental rights, and for the human rights protections afforded to the global community.

The review of the GCTS is an important opportunity for States and other stakeholders to address both the human rights of victims of terrorism and the prevention and redress of human rights violations caused by counter-terrorism measures. Egypt has been appointed to co-facilitate the review with Spain. It is of fundamental global importance that the review must not be allowed to be used as a self-interested endeavour by Egypt to weaken international human rights norms.

We strongly urge you to reconsider Egypt’s appointment as co-facilitator and appoint an alternative co-facilitator in its place.

Yours Sincerely,

Amnesty International
Article 19
CIVICUS
Charity & Security Network
International Commission of Jurists
Rights Watch UK
Saferworld
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom