

Recycling Detainees and Prisoners in Egypt: A Mechanism for Suppression and Circumvention of the Law



The phenomenon of “recycling detainees” or “recycling” represents one of the most significant human rights violations affecting political opposition and detainees in Egypt. This practice entails re-accusing detainees in new cases after their detention periods have expired or following the issuance of release orders, which results in their prolonged detention without a fair trial.

What is recycling detainees?

“Recycling detainees” refers to the re-detention of individuals after their pretrial detention period has ended or after a release decision has been made, by incorporating them into new cases involving similar or different charges, without unmistakable evidence or fair trials. This recycling often occurs through what are known as “combined cases,” which are active cases that include numerous defendants with no established connections and are added to gradually.

The recycling mechanism.

Detainees in Egypt are recycled through several mechanisms, including:

- Re-accusation in new cases: After a decision is made to release a detainee, he is charged in a new case with the same previous allegations or with other fabricated charges.
- Transferring the detainee from one prison to another: The detainee is moved to a new detention facility without notifying his lawyer or family, which obstructs the defense process.
- Temporary enforced disappearance: In certain cases, the detainee is concealed for a time before reappearing before the prosecution as a defendant in a new case.
- Expansion of pretrial detention: Pretrial detention functions more as a punitive measure than a precautionary one, often extended for durations surpassing the legal maximum.

Most targeted groups

This mechanism is used against several groups in Egyptian society, including:

- Political and human rights activists: They are subjected to recycling to prevent them from engaging in any opposition activities.
- Journalists and media professionals: They are recycled due to their press reports or for expressing their opinions.
- Political opponents: This includes both members of opposition parties and independents.
- Academics and students: Particularly those with opposition inclinations or who criticize government policies.

Examples of recycling cases include Dr. Essam El-Haddad, who was recycled after serving a ten-year sentence, as well as Ambassador Rifaa El-Tahtawy. Additionally, Mr. Maher Hazima and Mrs. Hoda Abdel Moneim, the lawyer, were recycled after serving their sentences. Furthermore, Osama Morsi was recycled and is currently being investigated in another case. Hundreds of young people have been recycled in numerous cases, preventing them from leaving or being released.

Legal and human rights consequences

- Violation of the Egyptian constitution: The constitution guarantees the right to a fair trial and prohibits arbitrary detention.
- Violation of international conventions, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits arbitrary detention.
- Egypt's ongoing decline in human rights adversely impacts the country's international standing and invites criticism from organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

International and local human rights organizations condemn the recycling of detainees, viewing it as a form of arbitrary detention and a circumvention of the law. The United Nations also releases reports denouncing this practice and has urged the Egyptian authorities to uphold the rights of detainees and cease using pretrial detention as a form of punishment.

Ultimately, recycling detainees in Egypt serves as a repressive tool designed to keep opponents and activists in custody without a fair trial, which constitutes a blatant violation of human rights. Both local and international calls are growing to end this practice and uphold the principles of justice and law, yet the authorities persist in using it to stifle any dissenting voices.

Therefore, we must address this serious violation and make it the focus of the media and the world to resist this repressive practice that contravenes local laws, as well as international laws and conventions. This may urge decision-makers to put an end to it and uphold the rule of law.