

UN rights chief warns Egypt at risk of drifting away from ideals that ignited revolution



High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay. UN Photo/Violaine Martin

8 May 2013 – Expressing concern about key legislative measures being considered by Egyptian authorities, the United Nations human rights chief today [urged](#) the Government to take steps to ensure it does not drift further away from the ideals that drove the 2011 revolution in the country.

In particular, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay pointed to a draft law that would constrain the activities of civil society organizations, as well as efforts to limit the authority of the judiciary, as measures that should be carefully examined and brought into line with international standards before they are adopted.

“I am very concerned that the new law, if adopted in its current form, may leave them in a worse situation than they were prior to the fall of the Mubarak Government in 2011. And – after all the country has been through in the past two years – that would be a truly tragic development,” Ms. Pillay said.

“This is a critical moment, with mounting concerns about a range of issues. These include the new Constitution and the manner in which it was adopted, the apparent efforts to limit the authority of the judiciary, and this current draft law which risks placing civil society under the thumb of security ministries which have a history of abusing human rights and an interest in minimizing scrutiny.”

Protests that erupted on 25 January 2011 eventually toppled the then President Hosni Mubarak and led to a transition period in the country, which was part of a larger group of movements in the region that became known as the Arab Spring.

In June 2012, Mohammed Morsi was elected President in the first presidential elections since the revolution began. However, protests were reignited when Mr. Morsi issued a Constitutional Declaration in November temporarily suspending the powers of Egyptian courts, and again when the country voted on a draft Constitution in December 2012.

Ms. Pillay said her office ([OHCHR](#)) had submitted detailed comments and proposals regarding the draft law on civil society.

“The proposed law has gone through various drafts. There remains some confusion – and much concern that the latest draft, like previous ones, largely ignores inputs from local and international human rights organizations, and, if adopted, will impose a series of draconian restrictions on civil society organizations, especially those focused on human rights,” she said.

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“It seems that there is a real risk that the current draft will not only make it difficult for civil society to operate freely and effectively, but may also conflict with Egypt’s obligations under international law to uphold the right to freedom of association.”

Ms. Pillay underlined that the rights to freedoms of association and assembly, which are currently under threat, are the very rights that prompted Egyptian women and men to come together during the Egyptian revolution.

“Governments that seek to constrain these types of activities, for example by controlling access to funds, giving sweeping oversight powers to security agencies, and placing undue constraints on international human rights organizations – all elements contained in the various drafts of this law – risk slipping quickly into authoritarianism, even if that is not their initial intention,” the High Commissioner warned.

Ms. Pillay also noted that the new Constitution risks giving the Executive excessive power over the judiciary by allowing the President to directly appoint judges to the Supreme Court. “This concentration of power risks undermining the independence of the judiciary.”

She added that recent actions by authorities targeting protesters, journalists and other activists need to be investigated and reiterated her office’s readiness to work with the Government on these issues.

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