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EGYPT

WOMEN RISK LENGTHY IMPRISONMENT FOR ‘INDECENCY’

Egyptian women social media influencers Hanin Hossam and Mawada el-Adham have been arbitrarily detained since Cairo’s Criminal Court convicted them for inciting “indecent” content, human trafficking, and other bogus charges, in June 2021 and sentenced them to lengthy prison terms. Mawada el-Adham’s appeal against her ruling is pending. Hanin Hossam is currently being retried, as provided by Egyptian law for those convicted in their absence. They must be immediately released, as they are being punished solely for peacefully exercising their human rights.

23-year-old Hanin Hossam and 21-year-old Mawada el-Adham are serving unjust lengthy prison sentences, following their conviction by Cairo’s Criminal Court in June 2021 of inciting young women to broadcast "indecent" content on social media to earn money, commercial exploitation, human trafficking and other offences. Amnesty International believes that they are being punished for the way they dance, talk, dress and attempt to “influence” the public online, amid the authorities’ crackdown on women’s freedom of expression and attempts to police the conduct of women online. The organization reviewed the videos that led to their convictions, as well as their verdicts, and found no credible evidence linking the two women to acts that would amount to trafficking in persons, as defined by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, or other internationally recognizable criminal offences.

During the issuing of the verdict, the presiding judge [openly expressed](#) bias and hostility against the women, accusing them of tarnishing the nation's morals and warning against using social media tools to undermine Egypt’s values. Mawada el-Adham's appeal against her six-year prison sentence is pending. Hanin Hossam, who was sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment in her absence, is now standing trial again in accordance with the Egyptian Code of Criminal Procedures, which gives those convicted in their absence the possibility to request a retrial. Amnesty International is concerned about Hanin Hossam's mental health, as she repeatedly expressed her despair during her court hearings. On [20 December 2021](#), she told the presiding judge: "I live in a swamp, in a swamp I swear, and I am dying 100 times every day because my future is lost". Her next hearing is scheduled for 22 March 2022. They were held in al-Qanater prison for women at the time of writing.

Write to the President urging him to:

- quash Hanin Hossam and Mawada el-Adham’s convictions and sentences
- release them immediately as they are being punished for their conduct online in the name of “morality” and “decency”
- protect their rights to privacy, freedom of expression, non-discrimination and bodily autonomy
- put an end to the wider crackdown on women social media influencers in Egypt.

Write to:

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Additional information

Since April 2020, the Egyptian authorities have intensified their crackdown on social media influencers in an apparent attempt to police women's bodies and conduct and undermine their ability to earn an independent living. Since then, the Egyptian authorities have arrested and prosecuted 10 women TikTok influencers for violating the draconian cyber-crimes law, and other overly vague legal provisions related to "decency" and "inciting immorality". Those prosecuted all have large followings on social media, ranging from hundreds of thousands to several million. Nine of the 10 women were sentenced to prison terms ranging between two and 10 years and heavy fines on morality-related or other bogus charges, and at least seven of them remained unjustly imprisoned at the time of writing. Their arrests followed complaints made mainly by male content creators purportedly outraged by the women's behaviour and investigations by the Morality Directorate of the Ministry of Interior. According to Hanin Hossam's police investigation report, which was reviewed by Amnesty International, the role of the directorate is to "prosecute those using online applications and websites to publish content inciting citizens, especially young people, to act in a way that contravenes with customs and traditions or spread ideas and acts of immorality and debauchery in society." On 29 April 2020, the public prosecution issued a [statement](#) "reaffirm[ing] its commitment to continue fighting shameful crimes violating the principles and values of our society", warning again [on 2 May](#) 2020 that Egypt was protecting the "new cyber border... abused by forces of evil".

The authorities first arrested Hanin Hossam on 21 April 2020 and Mawada el-Adham on 14 May 2020, and referred them to trial on charges of "violating family principles and values" and inciting "indecent" and "debauchery". On 27 July 2020, a Misdemeanours Cairo Economic Court convicted and sentenced them to two years in prison and a fine of 300,000 EGP (around 19,000 USD) each. On 12 January 2021, an appeal court acquitted Hanin Hossam for lack of incriminating evidence, and commuted Mawada el-Adham's sentence to a fine.

However, the public prosecution indicted them on separate charges, including human trafficking, and referred them to criminal court. According to the verdict of the Cairo Criminal Court issued on 20 June 2021, the court used videos described as "indecent" as evidence to convict them, including a video of Mawada el-Adham "dancing in public wearing indecent clothes for seduction" and Hanin Hossam's advertisement video "inciting immorality (...) in pursuit of profits". In the Instagram video that led to her conviction, Hanin Hossam, who has over one million followers on TikTok, encouraged women over the age of 18 to post videos of themselves on the application Likee, that is monetized based on the number of viewers. Mawada el-Adham, who has over three million followers on TikTok, was convicted based on TikTok videos showing her dancing with a six-year-old girl and jokingly asking her if she was dating. In court, the girl's parents raised the issue of their consent to post the videos online.

Following the ruling by the Cairo Criminal Court on 20 June 2021, Hanin Hossam appeared in a video on Instagram expressing her shock over the lengthy sentence and appealing to the president: "What did I do? 10 years! Since I was released (after nine months of pre-trial detention), I did not speak out or complain or say that I was unjustly detained or suffered (...) Why do you want to jail me again?". She also expressed her confusion for being punished for her involvement in promoting the Likee application as it was legal in Egypt. Hanin Hossam, who had been released on bail on 2 February 2021 after her acquittal in the first case, was rearrested on 22 June 2021.

According to police investigations in this case dated 23 April 2020 and examined by Amnesty International, ten suspects were accused of "establishing a criminal group", including four Chinese executives of Bigo Limited company, which owns the Likee application. The company remains legally registered in Egypt, and investigations against its executives were closed. In a meeting with the Chinese ambassador in Cairo on 30 August 2020, the Public Prosecutor [confirmed](#) that no legal actions had been taken against the company and its executives "in light of the distinction between the personal responsibility and the company's responsibility". The Chinese ambassador expressed his respect for the customs and traditions of the Egyptian society. On 20 June 2021, three Egyptian men were convicted and sentenced to six years in prison and a fine of 200,000 EGP (around 12,800 USD), each in relation to the same case purportedly for assisting Hanin Hossam and Mawada al-Adham to commit human trafficking.