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Egypt: Arrest and harassment of human rights defender Ahmed Gamal Ziada's father

On 22 August 2023, Egyptian security forces arrested and harassed the father of human rights defender and journalist **Ahmed Gamal Ziada** near his workplace in Giza, Egypt. He was questioned about his son's work and charged with three counts, including belonging to a banned group. This incident followed a series of publications from Ahmed Gamal Ziada criticising the restrictions on freedoms and rights in Egypt in the context of the upcoming February 2024 presidential elections.

[Ahmed Gamal Ziada](#) is an Egyptian human rights defender, photojournalist, columnist and investigative reporter who has been particularly active in covering human rights issues in Egypt. He is the editor-in-chief of the independent news website Zawia3 (Third Angle), with his work featured in publications such as Masr Alarabia, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, and Aljazeera. He also worked as a human rights researcher with different human rights organisations in Egypt. He is a vocal advocate for freedom of expression and the release of imprisoned journalists in Egypt.

On 22 August 2023, Gamal Abdel Hamid Ziada, the father of human rights defender Ahmed Gamal Ziada, was arbitrarily arrested by plain-clothed men near his workplace in Giza city, Egypt. No arrest warrant was presented. His phone was confiscated, and he was detained in an unknown location.

During his interrogation, Gamal Abdel Hamid Ziada was blindfolded and handcuffed, and he was repeatedly questioned about his son's work. He was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution office where he was subsequently charged with misuse of social media, spreading false news, and belonging to a banned group. Despite concerns for his well-being due to his medical history, his family was not permitted to visit him. He is currently in detention pending a 15-day investigation period.

The father of the human rights defender solely uses his social media accounts to promote his private clothing manufacturing workshop. He has no involvement with any human rights or political activities, and has not faced prior arrest or interrogation.

Before being brought before the Prosecution office, Gamal Abdel Hamid Ziada was questioned multiple times about his son. The questioning officer alleged that his son was stirring dissent against the state and labelled him as “the fleeing journalist.”

This incident follows Ahmed Gamal Ziada's early coverage and several publications regarding the upcoming presidential elections scheduled to take place in February 2024. Zawia3, the news website where the human rights defender serves as editor-in-chief, has also published critical reports on social, economic and political rights in the context of the current Egyptian government, expressing criticism of the President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. The platform has also published articles criticising the national dialogue that was initiated by the Egyptian President with the aim of achieving political reforms.

Ahmed Gamal Ziada has faced repeated targeting from the Egyptian authorities due to his human rights work. In 2019, the human rights defender was arrested on charges of alleged “spreading false news,” and ultimately released on bail after two months. In 2013, he was arrested and detained for filming police violence during protests. He endured 16 months of pre-trial detention, physical violence and torture before being released and acquitted in 2015. He currently resides in Belgium, pursuing studies in international relations and political science.

This incident reflects a pattern of the Egyptian authorities attempting to silence human rights defenders and activists abroad or in exile by targeting their families and relatives within Egypt. Relatives of human rights defenders, activists and journalists based abroad have been subjected to arrests, prosecutions and interrogations by the Egyptian authorities.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the arrest, arbitrary detention, and prosecution of Gamal Abdel Hamid Ziada, the father of human rights defender Ahmed Gamal Ziada, and is concerned about his safety and physical well-being. Front Line Defenders believes that the targeting and harassment of the human rights defender’s family stem solely from his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in Egypt to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Gamal Abdel Hamid Ziada, the father of human rights defender Ahmed Gamal Ziada, and drop all charges against him;
2. Cease all forms of harassment against the human rights defender Ahmed Gamal Ziada and his family;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all Egyptian human rights defenders are able to carry out their human rights work without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.