

Egypt extends detention period for four journalists held as part of mass trial

Egyptian national security prosecutors ordered four more journalists to be detained as part of a case in which more than a dozen journalists, along with academics and activists, are charged with belonging to a banned group and with spreading false news.



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The Committee to Protect Journalists called on authorities to immediately release the journalists and end their crackdown on the press.

Since August 14, prosecutors have ordered *Al-Shaab* news website [photojournalist](#) Mervet al-Hosiny, *Veto* news website [photojournalist](#) Islam Gomaa, satirical blogger Islam al-Refai, known as Khorm, and freelance photojournalist Zeinab Abu Ouna, to be detained for 15 days each, according to the local press freedom groups the Arab Network for Human Rights Information and the Association of Freedom of Thought and Expression, and [news reports](#).

Khorm was due to be released on bail in a separate case when new charges were brought, according to the reports.

"Even when the hand of justice finally reaches for a journalist, Egypt's national security prosecutors bat it away and put forward a new excuse to keep the journalist in jail," said CPJ Middle East and North Africa program coordinator Sherif Mansour. "We call on authorities to immediately free all journalists who were arrested arbitrarily."

Khorm, who ran a [satirical](#) Twitter account with 75,000 followers, was due to be released after nine months' detention in a separate case when he was detained on the new charges, the independent news website *Mada Masr* [reported](#).

A Giza Criminal Court on August 16 had upheld a [decision](#) to release Khorm on bail of 2,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$112) in the earlier case in which he was charged with belonging to a banned group and spreading false news, despite the prosecution's [appeal](#), the Association of Freedom of Thought and Expression [reported](#).

Human rights

Fatma Serag, a lawyer for Association of Freedom of Thought and Expression who is representing Khorm, told *Mada Masr* that a national security investigation alleged that the journalist communicated with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which were described as "hostile" to Egypt. The journalist denied the allegation, according to Serag. The lawyer told *Mada Masr* it was the first time the prosecution defined those two organisations as being anti-state and classed communication with them as a crime.

Ouna, who most recently [covered medical](#) stories for the pro-government daily, *Al-Watan*, was arrested on August 17 at Cairo's international airport as she was about to board a flight to Lebanon, Serag told *Mada Masr*. The lawyer said that she only learned of the journalist's detention order on August 19, when she attended a hearing for Khorm as part of the same trial.

Nour Fahmy, a lawyer for Gomaa, [told](#) the local news website *Katib* that on August 14, Cairo's national security prosecutor ordered the journalist's detention to be renewed for 15 days. Gomaa, who covered public funerals for *Veto*, was arrested on June 29 and appeared in front of the prosecutor for the first time on August 7, his lawyer said.

Prosecutors on August 18 extended the detention period for al-Hosiny, who covered protests and was arrested at her Cairo home on July 5, her outlet [reported](#). The journalist's lawyer, Amr Mohamed, told *Katib* she was taken to the hospital on August 19 after her health deteriorated following the prosecutor's decision.

The prosecutor general's office did not immediately respond to CPJ's email requesting comment.

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