



**“THIS WILL ONLY END WHEN
YOU DIE”**

NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY HARASSMENT OF FORMER POLITICAL
DETAINEES AND ACTIVISTS IN EGYPT

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

© Amnesty International 2021

Except where otherwise noted, content in this document is licensed under a Creative Commons (attribution, non-commercial, no derivatives, international 4.0) licence.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>

For more information please visit the permissions page on our website: www.amnesty.org

Where material is attributed to a copyright owner other than Amnesty International this material is not subject to the Creative Commons licence.

First published in 2021

by Amnesty International Ltd

Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street

London WC1X 0DW, UK

Index: MDE 12/4665/2021

Original language: English

amnesty.org



Cover photo: Illustration depicting coercive questioning by National Security Agency officer.
© Amnesty

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



CONTENTS

Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
2. METHODOLOGY	8
3. BACKGROUND	9
4. COERCIVE QUESTIONING TO CRUSH DISSENT	10
5. LACK OF LEGAL REMEDIES	13
6. TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT	15
7. VIOLATIONS OF RIGHT TO PRIVACY AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT	17
8. PAVING THE WAY TO PROLONGED DETENTION	19
9. NSA MONITORING – A FORM OF EXTRAJUDICIAL POLICE PROBATION	20
10. IMPACT ON VICTIMS – LIVES DESTROYED	23
11. LEGAL FRAMEWORK	25
12. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	26

GLOSSARY

WORD	DESCRIPTION
MONITORING	The practise of subjecting former political detainees and activists to regular summons and probation by the National Security Agency officers without legal grounds
NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY (NSA)	A specialized police force that is responsible for policing terrorism and political cases.
PROBATION	A practise where under those subjected to it must spend an assigned number of hours at home or at police stations for a specific duration. Police probation can be ordered as a non-custodial alternative to pre-trial detention by judicial authorities. Police probation can also be a supplementary penalty imposed by courts in addition to prison sentences.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“I was destroyed and terrified; after the last time [I was summoned] I decided to leave at any cost, before I never thought about leaving Egypt. I thought once [court-mandated] probation ends I can live my life normally, but these summons terrified me, I am anxious and cannot think straight and cannot handle this treatment... I am tired and my family is tired.”

A female activist and former detainee explaining the impact of NSA summons and monitoring on her.

Officials at Egypt’s National Security Agency (NSA) are abusing their powers to punish and intimidate human rights defenders and other political activists and prevent them from engaging in human rights work or political activism through continuous summons, coercive interrogations and unlawful probation measures. The NSA, a ministry of interior police force that specializes in policing terrorism and political cases, has escalated since 2019 its use of summons and coercive questioning, without written warrant or notice and without allowing the presence of defence lawyers. Amnesty International found that NSA officers conduct these measures without judicial orders or legal grounds in violation international law and standards, as well as the Egyptian constitution and code of criminal procedures.

Amnesty International has documented 27 cases subjected to these extrajudicial punitive measures. Those targeted include human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, protesters, political activists and actual or perceived members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups. Thirteen of them are former prisoners, released after serving their prison sentences or individuals provisionally released from pretrial detention pending investigations. All 13 were arrested in cases stemming solely from the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom assembly, association or expression. The other 13 were targeted due to their perceived human rights and political activism.

It is impossible to determine the number of people subjected to NSA monitoring and summons without a legal basis, as the practice is carried out without orders by judicial authorities and there are no official written records available. Amnesty International has gathered information about the practice in six governorates, Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, Qalubiya, Dakahliya and Gharbiya suggesting its wide-spread nature. Lawyers interviewed for this briefing told Amnesty International that many of their clients that were released as early as 2015, but increasingly from 2017 onwards were subjected to these practices. Interviewees who have

been through monitoring told Amnesty International that they saw dozens of different people under monitoring, while they were at NSA locations for their own monitoring, suggesting that hundreds, if not thousands could be experiencing this at the time.

NSA officers have compelled victims to attend interrogations, threatened them with arrest, detention, and prosecution for failure to do so; and have raided the homes of those who failed to appear. In some cases, NSA officers ordered victims to report to NSA offices in police stations or separate NSA premises on a regular basis, where they remain deprived of their liberty for up to six hours, in what amounts to excessive and arbitrary police probation measures, applied without orders or oversight from judicial authorities or the possibility to seek remedy or redress.

These extrajudicial police probation measures (referred to as “monitoring” by NSA officers and those subjected to the abusive practice and used in that respect throughout this document) amount to an arbitrary deprivation of liberty and violations of the right to freedom of movement, expression, peaceful assembly, and association. They also facilitate torture or other ill-treatment and violations of the right to privacy and result in the infringement on other rights including the right to work and the right to family life. A former detainee, who shared with Amnesty International a copy of a court order showing the end of his probation, said:

“I went to the police station for the [NSA] monitoring and showed them the court decision ending my probation... they blindfolded me and took me to the NSA officer who told me: ‘[victim’s name] this paper, you can make a cone out of it and shove it you know where’... I said but this is court decision to end my probation, he replied: ‘We do not operate through decisions, you can wait after Iftar¹ so that I can shove it for you, or maybe you miss prison?’...He then told me I would continue to have to go to both probation and monitoring whether I like it or not, until they say stop... Even though I have a court decision [that ended the court-mandated probation], I go at the behest of the officer. This does not end, so there is no work or life even.”

NSA officers regularly ask those summoned about their human rights or political activities and views, including those they express on social media, as well as about the plans of opposition groups, political movements or human rights organizations to which NSA officers suspect they are affiliated. In the course of such interrogations, NSA officers routinely violate the victims’ right to privacy through intrusive questioning about their or their relatives’ personal lives and examine the content of their phones and social media accounts without warrant. In most cases documented by Amnesty International, NSA officers have threatened those summoned with imprisonment, torture and other physical harm against them and their families if they refuse to disclose the requested information or if they insist on continuing to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association or peaceful assembly following the interrogation.

Analysis of NSA officers questioning and threats to those targeted by these measures indicate that the purpose of these abusive practices by the NSA is to deter human rights defenders and other activists from engaging in any political or human rights work or criticism of the authorities and to extract information. One former detainee released in 2020, after spending six months in detention without trial solely due to his labour rights activism, recounted to Amnesty International his questioning by the NSA following a verbal summons to appear in person:

“The officer ...told me that he had recently been assigned the ... file and asked me about groups and activists and whether they were planning any actions to promote the file; he also asked me about what I am doing to advance that cause...He later noted a post I wrote on social media and warned me that such posts are used by Egypt’s enemies to defame the country and [that] I should refrain from writing such posts again.”

In cases documented by Amnesty International, those summoned for questioning were eventually released within four days. However, in two of the cases reviewed, NSA officers carried out their threats to arrest and detain those summoned for questioning, resulting in their detention over terrorism related charges as of the time of writing.

Eleven individuals told Amnesty International that in the course of interrogations NSA officers tortured and otherwise ill-treated them, including through beatings, coercive questioning while blindfolded, forcing them to stand for prolonged periods without water or access to toilet facilities and the use of profanities and insults. One lawyer summoned for questioning to an NSA office in 2020 told Amnesty International:

¹ During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dusk till dawn and attach particular importance to refraining from profanity and violence during this period.

“He kept asking me about [a human rights defender] and when I kept saying I do not know [them], he kept getting angrier, then he stood up and slapped me.”

Almost all of those regularly summoned or subjected to monitoring by the NSA told Amnesty International how they suffer from depression and anxiety as a result of living under constant police watch and in fear of arrest at any moment. They described how these measures have hampered their ability to carry out their work and negatively impacted their social lives and drove some into exile or self-censorship. NSA officers have also ordered victims not to travel abroad without their permission and stopped at least three individuals at the airport while attempting to leave, forcing some to seek dangerous irregular routes to flee Egypt. Among those who left the country or discontinued their activism are former staff of human rights organizations, showing the effectiveness of this NSA tool in further undermining the embattled human rights community. A woman human rights defender told Amnesty International:

“Since the [NSA] summon, I can’t focus on anything, my husband and I are forced to sleep in shifts, so if they [NSA] come to take us at night, we [including their toddler] have time to get ready. I could not sleep or think normally, until we left Egypt.”

Amnesty International is calling on Egypt’s Public Prosecutor to open effective, thorough, impartial and independent investigations into the NSA’s practice of subjecting individuals to extrajudicial police probation (NSA monitoring), summoning without written notice or warrant, and any allegations of torture or other ill-treatment in the course of such questioning with a view to holding those responsible to account. Those reasonably suspected of human rights violations should be removed from their posts, pending investigations. Further, Amnesty International urges the authorities to put an immediate end to this practice and uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi should instruct the minister of interior to immediately put an end to the extrajudicial harassment and summoning of human rights defenders and other activists, while the minister of interior should publicly denounce this practice.

2. METHODOLOGY

Amnesty International spoke to 19 men and seven women about their experiences of being summoned and interrogated by the NSA between 2020 and 2021, seven of whom have been subjected to NSA monitoring on a weekly or monthly basis. The organization also spoke to a relative and lawyer about the experience of another individual, and a relative of another man who underwent questioning by the NSA before their arrest and who remained detained at the time of writing. Amnesty International also examined court documents that confirmed the end of court-mandated police probation measures for former detainees.

Among those interviewed are 11 human rights defenders, lawyers, and civil society workers from seven Egyptian human rights organizations. Fourteen others were previously unjustly jailed in politically motivated cases, 13 of whom were released pending investigations and one following a conviction. The remaining three appear to have been targeted because the NSA suspected them to have been politically active or on the basis on their personal affiliations to well-known activists and human rights defenders.

Amnesty International also spoke to lawyers, human rights defenders and former activists who have experienced monitoring as early as 2015 to document the evolution of the practice.

Amnesty International conducted most interviews using secure messaging applications, while three interviews were conducted in person. All interviews were conducted in Arabic without translators. Amnesty International is withholding the names of targeted individuals, their organizational or political affiliations and other identifying details including dates and exact locations over concerns of reprisals by the NSA.

Amnesty International is grateful to the human rights defenders and lawyers who provided information for this briefing. It also wishes to express its deep gratitude to all victims who agreed to share their experiences.

3. BACKGROUND

Since the ousting of late former president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, the Egyptian authorities have rounded up tens of thousands of actual or perceived critics and opponents. Thousands continue to be detained arbitrarily solely for exercising rights guaranteed under international law, including the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, or on the basis of grossly unfair trials, including mass and military trials.² They include human rights defenders and other prisoners of conscience held in prolonged pretrial detention over bogus terrorism-related charges.³ NSA officers also regularly ignore court decisions to release individuals in pretrial detention or reveal the whereabouts of those subjected to enforced disappearances.⁴ In recent years, the Egyptian authorities have also tightened their stranglehold on the human rights movement, subjecting at least 31 leaders and staff of human rights NGOs and other civil society organizations to travel bans, asset freezes, and politically-motivated criminal investigations under Case No. 173, also referred to as “the foreign funding” case.⁵

The practice of security forces harassing those suspected of involvement in political activism or human rights work through regular summoning for questioning without written notice or warrant dates back to the era of Egypt’s long-term president, Hosni Mubarak, removed following the 25 January 2011 uprising. At the time, this abusive practice was carried out by the notorious State Security Information Service (SSIS), which was dismantled in March 2011 and replaced by the NSA without any vetting to remove SSIS officers reasonably suspected of torture, enforced disappearances and other crimes.

The NSA was established by minister of interior decision No. 455/2011, which dissolved the SSIS. Article 125 of law No. 109/1971 on the police (amended by law No.175/2020) establishes the role of the NSA as: 1) policing offences that harm the government from inside the country, organized and dangerous cross-border crimes and threats to national security, 2) policing terrorism crimes listed in the counter-terrorism law No.94/2015, 3) evaluating requests by foreigners to enter and reside in the country and policing them, 4) intelligence gathering for the minister of interior, 5) examining or seizing records with a reasoned judicial decision, 6) cooperating with other national security bodies, 7) cooperating and advising state institutions on national security, 8) representing the ministry of interior as relevant and 9) providing assessments and recommendations to relevant authorities on public opinion in relation to difficulties facing the state. Since July 2019, the NSA has been led by Major General Adel Gaafar, a former NSA and SSIS officer.⁶ He reports to Major General Mahmoud Tawfik, the minister of interior, himself a former NSA and SSIS officer, who headed the NSA from 2017 until his appointment in June 2018.⁷

² Amnesty International, *Egypt: An Open-Air Prison for Critics*, 20 September 2018, (Index: MDE 12/9107/2018), [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/9107/2018/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/9107/2018/en/)

³ Amnesty International, *Permanent State of Exception: Abuses by the Supreme State Security Prosecution*, 27 November 2019 (previously cited)

⁴ Amnesty International, *Officially, ‘You Do not Exist’-Disappeared and Tortured in the Name of Counter-Terrorism*, 13 July 2016, (Index: MDE 12/4368/2016), [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/4368/2016/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/4368/2016/en/)

⁵ Amnesty International, “Egypt: End shocking reprisal campaign against leading Egyptian rights group”, 20 November 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/egypt-end-shocking-reprisal-campaign-against-leading-egyptian-rights-group/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/egypt-end-shocking-reprisal-campaign-against-leading-egyptian-rights-group/)

⁶ Akhbar al-Youm, “Personal Resume of Colonel Mahmoud Tawfik, the New Minister of Interior,” 14 June 2018, tinyurl.com/3ebs84je and Masrawy, “Who is the New Ministry of Interior Fox Appointed as the Head of the National Security Agency,” 28 October 2017, tinyurl.com/yjizr3xa

⁷ Ahram Online, “Egypt names a new head for National Security Agency,” 19 December 2015, english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/173949/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-names-a-new-head-for-National-Security-Agenc.aspx

4. COERCIVE QUESTIONING TO CRUSH DISSENT

“He [NSA officer] asked me about groups and activists and whether they were planning any actions to promote the file; he also asked me about what I am doing to advance that cause...He later noted a post I wrote on social media and warned me that such posts are used by Egypt's enemies to defame the country and [that] I should refrain from writing such posts again.”

A former detainee recalling what the NSA officer told him during a verbal summons.

In recent years, NSA officers have regularly subjected human rights defenders as well as actual or perceived opponents and critics to coercive questioning and threatened them with imprisonment, with the apparent aim of silencing them and deterring them from involvement in public life, political activism or human rights work or to extract information and coerce them into becoming informants.

Amnesty International found that such summons for questioning take place most frequently in response to activities, events or publications by NGOs, as well as following critical posts on social media. NSA officers also frequently summon individuals for questioning ahead of expected protests, including well-known activists with a history of participation in protests. Some of those interviewed by Amnesty International also reported the proliferation of summons after new NSA officers are assigned to monitoring political or human rights groups. Other times, the triggers for summoning are unclear with NSA officers themselves claiming the purpose to merely be a “check-in.” Of those 26 individuals interviewed by Amnesty International who were summoned for interrogations, NSA officers instructed 14 to report to them for questioning multiple times. One individual was asked to report for questioning seven times over the course of four months.⁸

⁸ See section NSA monitoring for the pattern of regular summons.

Between one and three NSA officers are usually present during interrogations. They sometimes order for those summoned to be blindfolded. Those interrogated told Amnesty International that they were instructed by NSA officers to come alone, and that bringing their lawyer was not an option they even considered for fear of reprisals for deviating from orders. Questioning usually lasts between one and six hours and revolves around the political views and activities of those summoned. NSA officers regularly warn those summoned against involvement in protests or expressing critical opinions on social media.

One former detainee released in 2020, after spending six months in detention without trial solely due to his labour rights activism, recounted to Amnesty International his questioning by the NSA following a verbal summons to appear in person:

“The officer ... told me that he was recently assigned the ... file and asked me about groups and activists and whether they were planning any actions to promote the file; he also asked me about what I am doing to advance that cause... He later noted a post I wrote on social media and warned me that such posts are used by Egypt's enemies to defame the country and [that] I should refrain from writing such posts again.”⁹

In some cases, NSA officers also seek to pressure those questioned to inform on their organizations or groups, either through threats with dire consequences or financial enticement and having a “friend” at the NSA.

A lawyer summoned three times in 2021 told Amnesty International:

“He [NSA officer] asked me about the work of the organization to which he believed I was affiliated and on specific details related to other staff members that are not publicly known.”¹⁰

A human rights defender summoned once in 2020 told Amnesty International:

“He asked me about the work of the organization, the director, funding and what I do... He said: ‘listen ... if I find that you are lying to me, you will never see the sun again’.”¹¹

Another human rights lawyer summoned in 2021 told Amnesty International:

“He asked me about a study that the organization where I work had issued and [questioned] how [we] could have done so without checking in with him first.”¹²

In addition to human rights defenders, individuals with a history of participation in protests are frequently targeted for summoning. Amnesty International interviewed a number of people who were called for questioning ahead of 20 September 2020, the anniversary of nationwide protests a year earlier.¹³ One woman told Amnesty International:

“He [NSA officer] asked me about my plans for 20 September, I told him I won't do anything; so, he asked: ‘So you are not going to protest?’, and I told him I won't, I just want to lead a normal life and overcome what happened to me in prison.”

A woman activist who was under monitoring told Amnesty International:¹⁴

“During the monitoring period, I wrote something on Facebook about [a currently detained activist], and this angered them [NSA officers], they ordered me to delete, and I did. It is not really an interrogation, but rather to insult me, they keep insulting me then I leave.”¹⁵

A human rights defender summoned in 2021 told Amnesty International:

“He asked about my brother and if I am back to my 'old activities or learned the lesson [in reference to his and his brother's detention]’.”¹⁶

⁹ Interview on 27 May 2021.

¹⁰ Interview on 6 July 2021.

¹¹ Interview on 26 June 2021.

¹² Interview on 20 April 2021.

¹³ Amnesty International, “Egypt: Largest Wave of Mass Arrests since President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi Came to Power”, 2 October 2019) [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/egypt-largest-wave-of-mass-arrests-since-president-abdel-fattah-al-sisi-came-to-power/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/egypt-largest-wave-of-mass-arrests-since-president-abdel-fattah-al-sisi-came-to-power/) and Amnesty International, “Egypt: Rare Protests Met with Unlawful Force and Mass Arrests”, 2 October 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/10/egypt-rare-protests-met-with-unlawful-force-and-mass-arrests/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/10/egypt-rare-protests-met-with-unlawful-force-and-mass-arrests/)

¹⁴ See section 9 on NSA monitoring

¹⁵ Interview on 1 August 2021.

¹⁶ Interview on 14 July 2021.

In another case documented by Amnesty International, the NSA detained a journalist for four days after summoning him for questioning in 2020, before letting him leave without charge.

5. LACK OF LEGAL REMEDIES

“He [NSA officer] told me: ‘My name is... and this is my real name, and I do not even mind removing this thing [blindfold] from your eyes. Anyway, you are a [khawal] and I know you cannot do anything about it’.”

A former detainee recalling intimidation by NSA officer during monitoring.

As these practices are extrajudicial, victims have no legal avenues to report or challenge the legality of summons or monitoring by the NSA.¹⁷ They fear retaliation by the NSA including through enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment if they lodge any complaints with the judiciary or denounce their experiences publicly. Those questioned repeatedly told Amnesty International how NSA officers boasted and acted with full confidence that there would be no repercussions for their actions, and that they were above the law. One activist subjected to monitoring told Amnesty International that the NSA officer who questioned him bragged about not needing to blindfold him during interrogations and told him his real name, because nothing could be done to counter his actions or hold him accountable.

He told Amnesty International:

“He [NSA officer] told me: ‘My name is... and this is my real name, and I do not even mind removing this thing [blindfold] from your eyes. Anyway, you are a [khawal]¹⁸ and I know you cannot do anything about it’.”¹⁹

Those subjected to abuse in the courses of the monitoring found that they have no means to seek justice as well. A female activist who told Amnesty International that she was sexually harassed by a policeman said:

“When I wanted to file a complaint against the officer that sexually harassed me, I was told: “what do you mean you want to file a complaint? Do you want to go back to prison?” There is no such thing as filing a complaint here.”²⁰

Human rights lawyers told Amnesty International that they advise those called in for questioning or subjected to monitoring by the NSA to do as instructed, attempt to be conciliatory and refrain from taking any legal

¹⁷ Amnesty International, *Permanent State of Exception: Abuses by the Supreme State Security Prosecution*, 27 November 2019, (Index: MDE 12/1399/2019), [amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1213992019ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1213992019ENGLISH.pdf)

¹⁸ A derogatory term used against gay men, but also to denote someone is powerless

¹⁹ Interview on 14 June 2021.

²⁰ Interview on 1 August 2021.

measures as they are likely to backfire and lead to more severe harassment, and prolonged detention. One lawyer told Amnesty International:

“You cannot take a lawyer with you to these summonses, and I advise that those summoned just go, because if they do not there may be repercussions.”²¹

The complicity by prosecutors in NSA violations, previously documented by Amnesty International, as demonstrated by their systematic failure to investigate allegations of torture and enforced disappearances by the NSA and admitting torture-tainted “confessions” into evidence, present an additional impediment for victims seeking judicial remedy.²²

²¹ Interview on 3 May 2021.

²² Amnesty International, *Permanent State of Exception: Abuses by the Supreme State Security Prosecution*, 27 November 2019 (previously cited)

6. TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

“He insulted me and slapped me on my face when I told him that I do not work with, or know anyone in the Muslim Brotherhood.”

A female political activist and former detainee recalling how an NSA officer assaulted her during questioning.

Eleven individuals interviewed by Amnesty International said that NSA officers had tortured and otherwise ill-treated them during questioning, through beatings, threats of enforced disappearance, torture and imprisonment including against their family members and the use of degrading language and insults. Some of those questioned were blindfolded, handcuffed and were denied access to toilet facilities and denied any water during the duration of the interrogations. Treatment varied depending on the officer in charge, as well as the profile of those summoned for questioning. Well-known figures with established networks were at lower risk of being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.²³

One lawyer summoned for questioning to an NSA office in 2020 told Amnesty International:

“He kept asking me about [a human rights defender] and when I kept saying I do not know [them], he kept getting angrier, then he stood up and slapped me.”²⁴

A woman who has fled Egypt after being sexually harassed and called relentlessly for regular questioning by the NSA following her release from detention told Amnesty International:

“He insulted me and slapped me on my face when I told him that I do not work with, or know anyone in the Muslim Brotherhood.”²⁵

All women subjected to monitoring and coercive interrogations by the NSA interviewed by Amnesty International said that there were no policewomen or other female officials present during the interrogations or their presence in police stations or NSA buildings, increasing their vulnerability to sexual violence and harassment.

One woman told Amnesty International that an officer in a police station in Greater Cairo sexually assaulted her physically, while another said an NSA officer threatened her with rape.

A third woman told Amnesty International how she was subjected to mocking and taunting at the NSA section in a police station:

²³ Usually public figures with connections to both the NSA and opponents and critics.

²⁴ Interview on 24 June 2021.

²⁵ Interview on 1 June 2021.

“Every time [I went for monitoring] I was blindfolded; one time it was at night and I couldn’t see anything so a policeman led me. He then asked how come I didn’t know the way, since I had already been here before and I should have memorized it like others.”²⁶

When interrogations would drag on for hours and distraught relatives approached police stations or NSA premises, officials would deny having their loved-ones in custody and dismiss their concerns.

One former woman detainee who was regularly called to report to the NSA told Amnesty International:

“My family asked me to leave Egypt, because every time I get summoned and stay for long, they go and ask about me, but they tell them: ‘We do not have her and go look for your daughter somewhere else’.”²⁷

In some cases, documented by Amnesty International, NSA officers used degrading insults and profanities as well as threats of imprisonment, prolonged separation from relatives and other harm. A man subjected to NSA monitoring told Amnesty International:

“He told me: ‘You are a son of a bitch and I do not know where did you come from, just an insolent child...Son, we do not censor anyone’s opinion, but if I so much as get your scent in another shady business like 20 September [protests] or [redacted protest name] I will destroy you...Your mother who you did not see for a year and half [while detained] you will never see her again for your entire life’.”²⁸

In some sessions, NSA officers interrogated victims in an aggressive and intimidating manner, raising their voices. One woman summoned for questioning in 2021 told Amnesty International:

“He asked me who do I know in civil society and started naming some people including [redacted name of human rights lawyer] and if I am still in touch with my friends from university...Every time he did not like my answer he would shout.”²⁹

For some victims, threats continued even after they fled Egypt. A human rights lawyer who left Egypt after being summoned by the NSA several times and pressured to provide information about the organization where he worked told Amnesty International:

“I received a message from him [NSA officer] after I left saying that I was a coward for leaving and that from now on I am on the run for the rest of my life.”³⁰

²⁶ Interview on 11 June 2021.

²⁷ Interview on 11 June 2021.

²⁸ Interview on 14 June 2021.

²⁹ Interview on 1 June 2021.

³⁰ Interview on 26 June 2021.

7. VIOLATIONS OF RIGHT TO PRIVACY AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

“I was stopped at the airport [on departure] and questioned by the NSA [at the airport] who then told me that the NSA in my neighbourhood will call me and if they agreed, they will give me a signed paper to travel with, if [they don’t agree], then I won't travel.”

A female activist and former detainee recalling how the NSA banned her from travel.

NSA officers regularly violate the privacy of those they interrogate through intrusive questions about their lives, the lives of their family members and searching their phones without judicial order. Those interrogated by NSA officers told Amnesty International that they felt they had no choice but to respond to these questions and unlock their phones, as they were threatened with detention for failure to do so.

All 26 interviewed said they were asked about their personal lives, work, family, upbringing and friends. For example, a woman who was summoned in late 2020 told Amnesty International:

“They asked me about my upbringing, home, family in specific details...He would shout every time I spoke for long or asked a question saying do not answer my questions with questions or talk about useless issues.”³¹

A lawyer summoned twice in mid-2021 told Amnesty International:

“He asked me about my studies...and about [the names of countries I travelled to] and what I did in each country.”³²

Several said that NSA officers gave them instructions on how to conduct their lives or even manage their appearances, and ordered them to inform the NSA of any significant changes in their lives including change of residence, at the risk of imprisonment. A man who has been subjected to NSA monitoring since his release told Amnesty International:

³¹ Interview on 1 June 2021.

³² Interview on 9 June 2021.

“He [NSA officer] told me: ‘ Do not change your looks, so do not cut your hair or beard without informing us, if your phone is switched of, we will make a [criminal] case against you, if we find out you have another number and you did not tell us about it, you will regret it, if you change your address without informing us, you will regret it’.”³³

In five cases documented by Amnesty International, NSA officers restricted the ability of summoned individuals to travel abroad by instructing them to seek permission from the NSA before travelling. At least three interviewed individuals who attempted to travel without permission were stopped at the airport by NSA officers. Two of them, who were not under investigation by the prosecution at the time, had their passports seized.

A woman who has been subjected to additional NSA monitoring since her release under court mandated probation, pending investigations, told Amnesty International:

“I was stopped at the airport [on departure] and questioned by the NSA [at the airport] who then told me that the NSA in my neighbourhood will call me and if they agreed, they will give me a signed paper to travel with, if [they don’t agree], then I won’t travel... One week after, a policeman called me and instructed me to report to the police station... I was questioned about travelling and how I dared to travel without asking them.”³⁴

Two other activists, one subjected to NSA monitoring and the other summoned three times for questioning, told Amnesty International that they were prevented from travelling from Cairo International Airport on two separate occasions in 2020. After questioning them, NSA officers at the airport confiscated their passports and instructed them to collect them from their local NSA headquarters.

³³ Interview on 14 June 2021.

³⁴ Interview on 13 June 2021.

8. PAVING THE WAY TO PROLONGED DETENTION

In this briefing Amnesty International set out to document cases of former prisoners or pretrial detainees being subjected to monitoring and human rights defenders and activists subjected to coercive questioning. Of those subjected to monitoring, they have already been detained for periods of up to three years. While in the vast majority of cases documented by Amnesty International, the NSA freed those summoned following interrogations within four days, in two cases, these measures have led to prolonged detention over terrorism related charges. Three other individuals that refrained from responding to NSA summons and changed their locations told Amnesty International that the NSA raided their homes or family homes.

Anthropology master's student **Ahmed Samir Santawy** was arrested on 1 February 2021 after he had presented himself at the office of the NSA in New Cairo, in response to a verbal summons. He was subjected to enforced disappearance until 6 February, when he was brought to the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) for questioning. He told the prosecutor that during this period he was held without access to his family or lawyer in three separate locations. He said he was blindfolded and punched in the head and stomach during questioning at the NSA office in the Fifth Settlement Police Station. NSA interrogators focused on his studies and involvement in an anti-government Facebook page. The prosecutor failed to order investigations into his allegations of being forcibly disappeared and torture or other ill-treatment, and instead questioned him about this academic work and ordered his detention pending investigations into charges of "membership in a terrorist group", "spreading false news" and "using a social media account to spread false news" in Case No.65/2021.

On 28 May 2021, the SSSP referred Ahmed Samir Santawy to trial in front of the Misdemeanours Emergency State Security Court (ESSC) over the charge of "publishing false news to undermine the state, its national interests and public order and spread panic among the people" in a separate case. On 22 June 2021, the court convicted and sentenced Ahmed Samir Santawy to four years in prison, solely on the basis of social media posts criticizing human rights violations in Egyptian prisons and the state's mishandling of the pandemic, which he has denied writing.³⁵ Verdicts by ESSCs cannot be appealed to any court. The president has the power to approve, commute or quash the verdicts. Amnesty International considers Ahmed Samira Santawy to be a prisoner of conscience detained solely for exercising his human rights, and calls for him immediate and unconditional release.³⁶

In another case in early 2021, a man summoned to NSA monitoring in Cairo was arrested and taken to the SSSP, where he was accused of terrorism related charges and protesting illegally and detained pending investigations.³⁷

³⁵ Amnesty International, "Egypt: Master's Student Sentenced to Four Years in Prison for Publishing 'False News'", 22 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/egypt-masters-student-sentenced-to-four-years-in-prison-for-publishing-false-news/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/egypt-masters-student-sentenced-to-four-years-in-prison-for-publishing-false-news/)

³⁶ Amnesty International, "Egypt: Further Information: Student Unjustly Jailed over 'False News': Ahmed Samir Santawy," 5 July 2021, (index number: MDE 12/4396/2021), [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/4396/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/4396/2021/en/)

³⁷ Interview on 26 August 2021.

9. NSA MONITORING – A FORM OF EXTRAJUDICIAL POLICE PROBATION

“I asked him [NSA officer] until when I will have to report for monitoring, he said [redacted] as long as you entered this path [political activism], do not ask us when we will stop, this will only end when you die.”

A female activist and former detainee recalling NSA officer ordering her to regularly report to him without legal grounds.

Under Egyptian law, police probation can be ordered as a non-custodial alternative to pre-trial detention by judicial authorities. Police probation can also be a supplementary penalty imposed by courts in addition to prison sentences. Those under police probation must spend an assigned number of hours at home or at police stations for a specific duration. Amnesty International has previously documented how such judicially sanctioned probation measures have been used in an arbitrary and excessive manner to punish opponents and critics and to crush dissent.³⁸

In a practice that amounts to police probation without judicial decision or other legal basis, NSA officers have been coercing individuals they perceive to be political or human rights activists to report to NSA offices in police stations or other NSA premises on a weekly or monthly basis, by threatening to arrest them if they do not comply. Those summoned must report at the specified time, hand over photocopies of their national identification cards and phones to policemen and spend anything between 15 minutes to six hours at the assigned location. During this period, NSA officers sometimes interrogate them or on other occasions order them to leave without questioning. The duration of these measures is indefinite as they are not based on a judicial decision, and it left entirely to the discretion of NSA officers, who themselves use the term “monitoring” to denote the practice.

It is impossible to determine the number of people subjected to NSA monitoring, as the practice is carried out without orders by judicial authorities and there are no official written records available. Amnesty International has gathered information about the practice in six governorates, Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, Qaluybiya, Dakahlia and Gharbiya suggesting its wide-spread nature. Lawyers interviewed for this briefing

³⁸ Amnesty International, “Egypt: Punitive Probation Measures latest Tactic Used to Harass Activists”, 6 March 2017, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/egypt-punitive-probation-measures-latest-tactic-used-to-harass-activists/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/egypt-punitive-probation-measures-latest-tactic-used-to-harass-activists/) and Amnesty International, *Egypt: Arbitrary and excessive use of probation measures against peaceful activists and individuals convicted after unfair trials*, 22 July 2019 (Index: MDE 12/0665/2019), [amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1206652019ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1206652019ENGLISH.pdf)

told Amnesty International that many of their clients that were released as early as 2015, but increasingly from 2017 onwards were subjected to these practices. Interviewees who have been through monitoring told Amnesty International that they saw dozens of different people under monitoring, while they were at NSA locations for their own monitoring, suggesting that hundreds, if not thousands could be experiencing this at the time.

Amnesty International interviewed seven individuals subjected to NSA monitoring in 2020 and 2021: a former convicted prisoner and six individuals released pending investigations by the SSSP, after spending up to two years in pretrial detention. All seven were arrested in connection with participation in protests, affiliation with peaceful opposition political movements and peacefully expressing their views on social media. They have been subjected to NSA monitoring for periods reaching two years, until the victims left the country or refrained from going, but living under constant fear of arrest. Those interviewed told Amnesty International that NSA officers regularly call them on their mobile phones at random times and order them to make themselves available to appear at specified locations, often at short notice. As a result, they spend their entire lives on guard, and some end their involvement in political activities or human rights work. In some cases, NSA officers or policemen informed convicted prisoners and pretrial detainees ahead of their releases that they would have to regularly report to NSA offices in police stations or separate NSA premises or face further imprisonment. In other cases, those subjected to police probation on the basis of court orders were also explicitly told to report for separate monitoring at NSA offices.

For example, a man subjected to NSA monitoring since his provisional release from pretrial detention in 2020 told Amnesty International:

“After a court ordered my release, they [the police] took me to a prison where I stayed for two weeks, where I was questioned twice by the NSA over my [political] history since 2012. They then moved me to an NSA jail for one more week... There, he [NSA officer] kept insulting me for some time, then said you shall go to your [court-mandated] probation and come here [NSA] for monitoring once a week, if you are late, I will open a [new] case against you.”³⁹

A woman who was undergoing court-ordered police probation as an alternative to pretrial detention described to Amnesty International how the NSA instructed her to report for separate monitoring:

“Ten months after my release [in 2019], I was going to the police station for probation, then a policeman told me the [NSA] officer wanted me. I went with him to an officer, who took down my personal information and then blindfolded me and went upstairs... I stayed blindfolded for hours until I started crying... They took me to another place, where I stayed until the morning. It was cold and I could hear people being beaten and screaming... In the morning, four officers questioned me about my history and what I was doing at the moment... In the end, the policeman went with me to finalize the court probation process and told me that I have to come back to him in two days [for NSA monitoring].”⁴⁰

Another former woman detainee subjected to NSA monitoring since her release in 2019 told Amnesty International:

“Two weeks after my release, a policeman called saying he was from the NSA and asked about my [court-mandated] probation... Then [he] said: ‘We will call you and you will report to us’, I asked him where, in the police station you mean, he said : ‘No, the headquarters [NSA] and when we call you respond’.”⁴¹

A third woman subjected to NSA monitoring since her release told Amnesty International:

“On 20 September 2020, the NSA went to my home and two policemen told me: ‘el pasha⁴² wants you’ ... We went to the NSA building and once I entered a man told me to face the wall, blindfolded me and tied my hands, then [he] took my phone and took me to a room, where I stayed for around six hours, before they let me go.”⁴³

NSA officers have also subjected former detainees to indefinite monitoring, even after their court-mandated probation ended.

³⁹ Interview on 14 June 2021.

⁴⁰ Interview on 11 June 2021.

⁴¹ Interview on 13 June 2021.

⁴² Turkish title for a high-ranking man, which was used in Egypt until 1952 and which continues to be used colloquially to convey that someone has a high social status. It is especially used by and in reference to police officers.

⁴³ Interview on 13 June 2021.

A former detainee, who shared with Amnesty International a copy of a court order showing the end of his probation, said:

“I went to the police station for the [NSA] monitoring and showed them the court decision ending my probation... they blindfolded me and took me to the NSA officer who told me: ‘[victim’s name] this paper, you can make a cone out of it and shove it you know where’... I said but this is court decision to end my probation, he replied: ‘We do not operate through decisions, you can wait after Iftar⁴⁴ so that I can shove it for you, or maybe you miss prison?’...He then told me I would continue to have to go to both probation and monitoring whether I like it or not, until they say stop... Even though I have a court decision [that ended the court-mandated probation], I go at the behest of the officer. This does not end, so there is no work or life even.”⁴⁵

A former woman detainee also recounted to Amnesty International about being subjected to indefinite monitoring by the NSA:

“I asked him [NSA officer] until when I will have to report for monitoring, he said [redacted] as long as you entered this path [political activism], do not ask us when we will stop, this will only end when you die.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dusk till dawn and attach particular importance to refraining from profanity and violence during this period.

⁴⁵ Interview on 14 June 2021.

⁴⁶ Interview on 13 June 2021.

10. IMPACT ON VICTIMS – LIVES DESTROYED

“Every day I smelled freedom and then go back to detention.”

A female activist and former detainee explaining the impact of monitoring on her.

Twenty people interviewed by Amnesty International said that living under constant threat of detention by the NSA left them feeling anxious and depressed, and affected their enjoyment of their human rights, including their right to work or education, and ability to lead their lives normally. They said they lived in constant fear and each time they went for questioning with a heavy heart given the uncertainty of whether they would be allowed to leave in the end. Several human rights defenders, activists and lawyers said that the persistent intimidation and threat of imprisonment, for some renewed, compelled them to stop expressing their opinions or participating in political activities. Some went into exile as a result.

One man summoned three times in 2021 in an apparent attempt to intimidate and recruit him to work as an informant told Amnesty International:

“Once I saw a private number calling me, I knew it was them [NSA] and I was afraid since. I could not focus on my studies or work. As the questioning day came nearer and [redacted] told me to report to them at 20:00, I was even more afraid that it was at night. When I went there, I was pissing my pants [metaphorically from fear] and shaking until I finally left the building.”⁴⁷

A human rights lawyer summoned several times during 2020 told Amnesty International:

“I am always cautious now, I never use Uber to go to the office, because they [NSA] might track me, I do not write on social media at all, I am worried about informants at the organization. I want to leave Egypt.”⁴⁸

A man who said that he was subjected to court-ordered probation and NSA monitoring simultaneously described how after his court-mandated probation ended, an NSA officer not only ordered him to continue to report to the police station during the hours set in the expired judicial order, but also increased the number of days each week during which he must report. He described to Amnesty International how this affects his daily life:

“I can't do anything in my life. I have [redacted] days every week of monitoring at the NSA and have to be available all the time by phone. He [NSA officer] can just call me to go and sit there all day, without asking a single question, so my entire day is wasted. It is impossible to find work. The NSA day for me is like a blackhole because I go there and I do not know what will happen. Every time I go, I write to someone that if I do not get

⁴⁷ Interview on 6 July 2021.

⁴⁸ Interview on 26 June 2021.

back to you by a certain hour, then they have detained me... I am under constant threat and dealing with the unknown ... I do not know when it will end.”⁴⁹

A woman human rights defender told Amnesty International:

“Since the [NSA] summon, I can’t focus on anything, my husband and I are forced to sleep in shifts, so if they [NSA] come to take us at night, we [including their toddler] have time to get ready. I could not sleep or think normally, until we left Egypt.”⁵⁰

Another woman described the devastating impact of NSA monitoring on her and her family’s wellbeing:

“Psychologically I was destroyed and terrified; after the last time [I was summoned] I decided to leave at any cost, before that I never thought about leaving Egypt. I thought once [court-mandated] probation ends I can live my life normally, but these summons terrified me, I am anxious and cannot think straight and cannot handle this treatment. I never thought I would be like the people who go there [NSA office] every week, I am tired and my family is tired.”⁵¹

A third woman described how monitoring devastated her social life:

“My life stopped for the duration of the monitoring; prison was better than monitoring. Every day I smelled freedom and then go back to detention. It was a daily shock. I hated my life, either you imprison me or let me go. I have suffered from social isolation, no one wants to talk to me.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Interview on 14 June 2021.

⁵⁰ Interview on 2 May 2021.

⁵¹ Interview on 11 June 2021.

⁵² Interview on 1 August 2021.

11. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Amnesty International found that the practice by the NSA to summon individuals for questioning and monitoring without judicial orders violates international law and standards, as well as the Egyptian Constitution and Code of Criminal Procedures.

Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right, to which Egypt is a state party, no individual may be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention and no one may be deprived of his or her liberty except on such grounds and according to such procedures as are established by law. Those detained must be promptly informed of the reasons of their detention and be brought promptly in front of to a judge. They must also be able to challenge the lawfulness of their detention and be notified of their rights including the right to remain silent. People suspected of or charged with criminal offences have the right to the assistance of counsel, including during initial questioning. According to international law and standards, deprivation of liberty as a result of exercising the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly or of discrimination on any grounds including political or other opinion is arbitrary.

According to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (The Tokyo Rules), “the introduction, definition and application of non-custodial measures shall be prescribed by law”, and decisions to apply non-custodial measures must be subject to review by a judicial or other independent authority. They also require that authorities explain, orally and in writing, the conditions governing non-custodial measures to those subjected to them, including their obligations and rights.

International law, the Egyptian constitution and Penal Code all prohibit torture and other ill-treatment as well as arbitrary or unlawful interference with a person’s privacy, family, home or correspondence.

The Egyptian Code of Criminal Procedures prohibits arrest, detention and searches without reasoned judicial decisions, while the Egyptian Penal Code criminalizes torture, coercion and subjecting anyone to punishment without legal grounds. The Egyptian Code of Criminal Procedures and Penal Code require a decision by the competent judicial authorities to subject anyone to police probation.

12. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International found that officials at Egypt's NSA have developed new abusive patterns of control to punish and intimidate human rights defenders and other political activists through repeated summons, coercive interrogations and unlawful probation measures. Their objective is clear: to deter human rights activism or political activism.

Those subjected to these measures said they lived in constant fear and each time they went for questioning with a heavy heart given the uncertainty of whether they would be allowed to leave in the end. Several human rights defenders, activists and lawyers said that the persistent intimidation and threat of imprisonment, for some renewed, compelled them to stop expressing their opinions or participating in political activities. Some went into exile as a result.

Amnesty International is calling on Egypt's Public Prosecutor to open effective, thorough, impartial and independent investigations into the NSA's practice of subjecting individuals to extrajudicial police probation (NSA monitoring), summoning without written notice or warrant, and any allegations of torture or other ill-treatment in the course of such questioning with a view to holding those responsible to account. Those reasonably suspected of human rights violations should be removed from their posts, pending investigations.

Further, Amnesty International urges the authorities to put an immediate end to this practice and uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi should instruct the minister of interior to immediately put an end to the extrajudicial harassment and summoning of human rights defenders and other activists, while the minister of interior should publicly denounce this practice.

Members of the UN human rights Council must urgently support the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the human rights situation in Egypt.

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.
WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS
TO ONE PERSON, IT
MATTERS TO US ALL.**

CONTACT US



info@amnesty.org



+44 (0)20 7413 5500

JOIN THE CONVERSATION



www.facebook.com/AmnestyGlobal



[@Amnesty](https://twitter.com/Amnesty)

“THIS WILL ONLY END WHEN YOU DIE”

NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY HARASSMENT OF FORMER POLITICAL DETAINEES AND ACTIVISTS IN EGYPT

Officials at Egypt’s National Security Agency (NSA) are abusing their powers to punish and intimidate human rights defenders and other political activists and prevent them from engaging in human rights work or political activism through continuous summons, coercive interrogations and unlawful probation measures

NSA officers have compelled victims to attend interrogations, threatened them with arrest, detention and prosecution for failure to do so; and have raided the homes of those who failed to appear. In some cases, NSA officers ordered victims to report to NSA offices in police stations or separate NSA premises on a regular basis, where they remain deprived of their liberty for up to six hours, in what amounts to excessive and arbitrary police probation measures, applied without orders or oversight from judicial authorities or the possibility to seek remedy or redress.

Egypt Public Prosecutor must open an effective, thorough, impartial and independent investigations into the NSA’s practice of subjecting individuals to extrajudicial police probation (NSA monitoring), summoning without written notice or warrant, and any allegations of torture or other ill-treatment in the course of such questioning with a view to holding those responsible to account. The Egyptian authorities must immediately put an end to the extrajudicial harassment and summoning of human rights defenders and other activists. Members of the UN Human Rights Council must urgently support the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the human rights situation in Egypt.