

A Petition to demand protective measures for prisoners in Egypt against COVID-19

To the Egyptian government: Fight the pandemic, Release the detainees!

We, the undersigned physicians, public health experts, jurists, politicians, Egyptian citizens and citizens from all over the world, express our grave concern at the gravity of the situation facing tens of thousands of prisoners and pretrial detainees in Egyptian prisons with the spread of COVID-19 caused by Coronavirus.

The documented overcrowding of prisons and places of detention and the insufficiency of prison health facilities threaten to transform these places of detention into dangerous clusters of the disease, creating a clear and present danger to the health and lives of prisoners, detainees, as well as officers and employees working in places of detention.

On Tuesday, March 10, Egyptian authorities suspended visitations to prisons and places of detention in an attempt to avert a potential crisis. This measure, however, is insufficient as it fails to deal with other possible avenues of infection. It also interrupts the delivery of clean clothes and food items, which are delivered to prisoners by their families. Moreover, court hearings for detainees and prisoners have all been suspended, and detention renewal hearings have been postponed in an attempt to control the spread of COVID-19, leaving many detainees in pre-trial detention without a real possibility to challenge their detention before a judge.

Last week, the Egyptian government announced the closure of all schools and a decrease in the number of government employees required to attend work in person. We support these prudent measures, and demand that similar exceptional measures be taken in relation to prisoners and detainees to ensure their safety, as well as the safety of officers and employees and their families. We believe that the potential spread of COVID-19 among prison inmates will cause a health crisis that extends well beyond prisons and have dramatic effects on the spread of the pandemic in Egypt.

As such, we call on Egyptian authorities to implement the following measures, which we believe are necessary for the safety of prisoners, detainees, officers and employees alike:

The immediate release of pretrial detainees, prisoners convicted of non-violent misdemeanors, nonviolent prisoners over 60 years of age, and nonviolent prisoners suffering from chronic respiratory or autoimmune diseases, who are particularly susceptible to the complications of COVID-19. Such release will ensure a significant and necessary reduction in the prison population, and the proper care for individuals at higher risk of complications.

For nonviolent prisoners, we propose implementing house arrest as an alternative to their current imprisonment, in a manner that will provide for better control of the disease.

Provide families of prisoners and detainees with accurate and up-to-date information about their imprisoned and detained relatives, and allow prisoners and detainees to communicate with their families by phone regularly in line with article 38 of the prison law, and especially in light of the suspended family visits.

Allow families of detainees and prisoners to deliver food and disinfectants to their imprisoned or detained relatives. And allow for the delivery of blankets, space heaters, clean clothes, all of which should be disinfected before delivery, to protect prisoners and detainees, and the entire society.

#LetThePrisonersOut