

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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January 26, 2021

Mr. Mostafa Madbouly, the Prime Minister of Egypt
Mr. Nader Saad, the official Cabinet spokesman

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

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Dear Sirs,

I am writing on behalf of Human Rights Watch to request information about the continuing home demolitions and forced evictions in the North Sinai governorate by the Egyptian Armed Forces. Our research findings show that the demolitions extend far beyond the two buffer zones in Rafah and al-Arish city that government officials have stated were necessary in order to destroy smuggling tunnels, prevent fighters and weapons from entering the Sinai Peninsula from the Gaza Strip, and protect al-Arish airport from armed attacks.

Human Rights Watch is an international, non-governmental organization working on human rights issues in more than 90 countries around the world. We are currently preparing a report on the home demolitions and evictions that have occurred in North Sinai since late 2017 and we would like to ensure that we reflect the government's views accurately and fairly. In our previous reports about home demolitions in Sinai in 2015 and 2018,¹ the witnesses we interviewed expressed concerns about the lack of proper notice and consultation before the evictions and the failure of the government to provide temporary housing, adequate compensation, or a fair and transparent mechanism to appeal their eviction and/or compensation. Our current research on these questions shows that these issues remain largely unaddressed.

Furthermore, our review of extensive satellite imagery shows that the government has demolished buildings in Rafah, Sheikh Zuwayed, and al-Arish city outside any stated buffer zones and without decree.

Human Rights Watch

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¹ See "Egypt: Thousands Evicted in Sinai Demolitions; In Insurgent Fight, Border Families Left to Fend for Themselves," Human Rights Watch press release, September 22, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/22/egypt-thousands-evicted-sinai-demolitions>, and "Egypt: Army Intensifies Sinai Home Demolitions; Destroys Homes, Farmland Around 'Buffer Zones,'" Human Rights Watch Press release, May 22, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/22/egypt-army-intensifies-sinai-home-demolitions>

We would appreciate your response to the following questions by **February 2, 2021**, so that we may reflect your views in any report we publish.

The al-Arish Airport security zone:

1. Did the government issue any formal decree(s) to regulate evictions and demolitions around al-Arish airport following President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's public statements about this plan on January 19, 2018? If so, could you provide a copy and the Official Gazette issue that included any such decree(s)?
2. What is the total area of the planned buffer zone around al-Arish airport? What are the zone's coordinates? What evidence exists that it was necessary to evict the whole zone?
3. How many buildings were demolished around al-Arish Airport since late 2017? How many of these buildings were residential homes?
4. How many farms were destroyed in developing the al-Arish airport buffer zone? What is the total area of the farmland razed?
5. What is the compensation process for the owners and residents of demolished buildings and destroyed farms? How many families and owners have been compensated so far, and how many were not? On what basis is the compensation amount calculated?
6. Did the government provide any help finding temporary accommodations and sources of income for evicted families, land and businessowners?
7. What other plans did the government consider to secure al-Arish Airport without resorting to widespread demolitions? Why were other plans not considered?
8. How many homes or other structures did the government demolish outside the al-Arish airport buffer zone and under what legal framework?

Rafah buffer zone:

1. How many buildings were demolished in and around Rafah since late 2013? How many of these buildings were residential homes? How many of these buildings were outside the planned Rafah buffer zone pursuant to Prime Ministerial Decree 1957 of 2014?
2. How many farms were destroyed in creating the Rafah buffer zone since late 2013? What is the total area of farmland razed?
3. How many occupied or unoccupied buildings remain undamaged in Rafah? What is the government plan regarding these buildings and any remaining families?
4. How many of the evicted Rafah families and owners were compensated? How many did not receive compensation, and why?

Sheikh Zuwayed:

5. How many buildings were destroyed in Sheikh Zuwayed and under what legal framework did this take place?
6. What is the government's plan for securing Sheikh Zuwayed?

Questions regarding North Sinai evictions generally since 2013:

1. In terms of supervising and following up the evictions and demolitions, what roles has the government assigned to the North Sinai governor and governorate administration, the Rafah and al-Arish city councils, the Egyptian armed forces, and the Cabinet?
2. What measures did the authorities take to consult local residents before the evictions in each case? When and where did the Egyptian armed forces or government hold meetings to seek the views of local residents?
3. What is the nature of the government entity or committee that is considering compensations and how can its decisions be appealed?
4. What guarantees exist to ensure that families receive the assigned compensations?
5. What legal mechanisms are available to appeal government decisions regarding evictions before the Administrative Court or other judicial body?
6. What help did the government offer for temporary accommodations and transportation of evicted families?
7. How many persons who refused to evacuate their home have been arrested? How many were prosecuted in a military court, and under what charges? How many were prosecuted in a civilian court and under what charges?
8. What is the total population of North Sinai in 2013 and what is it by the end of 2020 or the latest available census/estimate?
9. How many North Sinai residents have been displaced and evicted since late 2013? How many of those remained inside North Sinai and how many moved to Egypt's mainland?

Education

1. How many schools and school children have been affected by the evictions in each city of, Rafah, Sheikh Zuwayed and al-Arish, since 2013?
2. What measures has the government taken to ensure that the education of children from displaced families was not interrupted? How has the government planned for their continued education in other schools?

We would greatly appreciate your response to the above questions and will reflect any response received **by February 2, 2021** in our public reporting on this issue. Responses received following that date will be reflected on our website.

You may send replies to us via email  or fax .

Respectfully,



Deputy Director

Middle East and North Africa Division
Human Rights Watch