

350 Fifth Avenue, 34<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10118-3299  
Tel: +1-212-290-4700  
Fax: +1-212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

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November 1, 2021

Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator  
United Nations  
New York, NY

CC: António Guterres  
United Nations Secretary-General  
CC: Michelle Bachelet  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Re: UNDP Report on Human Development in Egypt**

Dear Mr. Achim Steiner,

We, the undersigned three human rights organizations, write to express our dismay at the UNDP's Egypt Human Development report, released in September 2021. The report masks the structural impediments to human development in Egypt and ignores the [UN's human rights-based approach](#) to human development. Examples of false and misleading claims made in the report are included in an annex to this letter.

The UNDP's report sets out a narrative that contradicts reports and statements made by other UN agencies and independent Human Rights Council experts, as well as scores of reports and assessments made by independent national and international human rights organizations over the past eight years. The Egypt Human Development report, as well as [public statements](#) made by UNDP Egypt, reflect a profound dissonance between the discourse of the UNDP and the reality on the ground in Egypt. The report provides misleading information to decision makers, including international financial institutions, which have a responsibility to take up pressing human rights and rule of law issues with Egypt. Accordingly, we urge you to take necessary measures to:

1. Revise the Egypt Human Development report to ensure that its contents align with the assessments of other UN experts and the UN's framework of a human rights based-approach to human development. Pending this revision, retract the report from all UN online portals.
2. Ensure that the UNDP in Egypt meaningfully consults with the relevant bodies at the UN, including human rights mechanisms, and with independent civil society actors prior to issuing such reports.



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3. Open an investigation into circumstances surrounding the drafting and publication of the report and make the findings of the investigation public.

The Egyptian government routinely denies and distorts the truth about the ongoing human rights crisis in Egypt, despite the scale and severity of human rights violations. The undersigned organizations wish to stress that when a UN agency lends credibility to false claims by a government, responsible for crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations and whitewashes the systemic nature of the gross violations taking place, it facilitates the repetition of similar violations and further encourages impunity. We are confident that you will give this matter the attention it deserves.

We would be happy to meet with you or your team to discuss this letter at your earliest convenience.

With assurances of our highest consideration,

**Co-signing organizations:**

Amnesty International

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Human Rights Watch

## **Annex I: Details of False and Concerning Statements in the UNDP Egypt Human Development Report**

The Egypt Human Development report commends Egypt's draconian counter-terrorism legislative framework, specifically the Counter-terrorism Law (No. 94 of 2015) and the Law on Terrorist Entities (No. 8 of 2015); as well as the Anti-Cyber Crime Law (No. 175 of 2018), all of which the Egyptian authorities have routinely used to criminalize any form of dissent and erode fair trial guarantees for those accused of terrorism and national security offences. The undersigned organizations and others have long documented that since the military removed the late president Mohamed Morsy from power in 2013, security forces have carried out grave violations in the name of counterterrorism, including enforced disappearances, mass arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment. These abuses are committed systematically and on a large scale. Credible evidence indicates these abuses are part of a state policy to quash dissent.

In February 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued a [statement](#) highlighting the misuse of the counter-terrorism law by Egyptian authorities to “attack individuals engaged in human rights work.” The UN experts also expressed their concern that “this indicates a systemic problem with human rights protections in Egypt, as well as a systemic problem in the abuse and misuse of counter-terrorism laws and practices.”

The UN special rapporteur on promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, with the endorsement of six other UN experts and Working Groups, warned in an April 2020 [statement](#) that “new regulations under Egypt's sweeping anti-terrorism law further erode fundamental human rights and could result in more arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and allegations of torture, and a wider crackdown on freedom of expression, thought, association and of peaceful assembly.” In July 2021, three UN experts, including the UN special rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, [highlighted](#) how this legislation restricts the work of civil society.

Michelle Bachelet, the UN high commissioner for human rights, has also repeatedly expressed her concern with the prosecution of human rights defenders and protestors under terrorism [charges](#) and by terrorism [courts](#) in Egypt.

The UNDP report, instead of incorporating these serious concerns, celebrates the Law Governing the Pursuit of Civil Work (Law No. 149 of 2019), stating that it serves to “strengthen the role of NGOs” in Egypt. The UNDP's statement is at odds with the public [communication](#) by three UN special mandate holders in July 2021, which urged the Egyptian government to review this law and ensure its conformity with Egypt's international human rights obligations, considering that the law and its regulations

“limit civil society’s access to funding and enable the executive to...regulate and dissolve civil society organizations.”

The UNDP claimed in its report that “Egyptian prisons have witnessed improvement.” This flies in the face of the April 2020 assessment of the spokesperson for the UN high commissioner for human rights that stated “Egypt’s prisons and detention facilities are often overcrowded, unsanitary, and suffer from a lack of resources. Detainees are routinely denied access to adequate medical care and treatment.” The special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, along with other experts, have also [stated](#) that the prison conditions in Egypt puts the lives of thousands of detainees in danger. The experts noted the death of former President Mohamed Morsy in jail, and highlighted that given the conditions of his imprisonment, his death “could amount to state-sanctioned arbitrary killing.” The experts called for an impartial investigation into the deaths of prisoners in custody since 2012.

In its section on the right to housing, the UNDP’s Egypt Human Development report claims that “Egypt follows specific rules and procedures regarding the relocation or evacuation of residents of unsafe or unplanned settlements, in line with the Special Rapporteur’s [on the right to adequate housing] guidelines which include the guideline ‘prohibit forced evictions and preventing evictions whenever possible.’” This claim contravenes the special rapporteur Leilani Farha’s [report](#) on her 2018 visit to Egypt, where she noted that Egyptian legislations undermine the right to housing, and the absence of sufficient appeal mechanisms and compensation procedures. Farha additionally highlighted several cases of forced eviction and home demolitions. In her report she expressed her deep concern “that individuals threatened with and affected by forced evictions, as well as lawyers and other human rights defenders of the right to housing, are afraid of reprisals if they provide information to special procedures to seek redress through international human rights mechanisms.” In fact, reprisals against those who cooperated with the special rapporteur during her visit to Egypt were so severe that in December 2018 she [stated](#), “Unless Egypt ensures that human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations can interact with UN human rights envoys without fear of reprisal, it is in our view not ready to host further visits.”

The information and insights provided by the Special Rapporteur, like those of the Special Rapporteurs cited earlier, were not included in the UNDP’s Human Development Report’s section on the right to housing.