

PRESS RELEASE

# Egypt: New legislation must protect free speech, not restrict it

ARTICLE 19

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**ARTICLE 19 expresses its deepest concerns about a new proposed Law on the Right to Demonstrate in Public Spaces in Egypt. If enacted, the law would render the right to protest meaningless, and give authorities draconian powers to quash dissent. ARTICLE 19 calls on the Shura Council (the Upper House of Parliament) to make sure that the Draft Law is brought in line with international standards, and that authorities respect the right to freedom of expression and facilitate the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.**

“The Draft Law is incredibly dangerous and seriously threatens freedom of expression in Egypt. After the hope of a revolution that inspired the world and a transition in which so much work is still invested, Egypt must now uphold its new constitutional protections for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly rights,” said Agnes Callamard, Executive Director of ARTICLE 19.

“It was the exercise of these rights, by brave men and women demanding social justice and freedoms they had been denied for decades, that brought about the Egyptian revolution. The promise of that revolution must not be betrayed by allowing draconian restrictions on protest to be introduced now,” she added.

ARTICLE 19’s analysis of the Draft Law on protest highlights a range of fundamental shortcomings:

- A failure to establish the obligation of the state to protect and promote the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Broad and unchecked powers for law enforcement to use severe and even lethal force to disperse assemblies, even where demonstrators are acting

peacefully.

- Sweeping powers for the government to turn vast swathes of Egypt into no-protest zones, ban protests at night entirely, and allow for the confiscation of tents, stages and radio equipment.
- New offences to restrict collective criticism targeting the government and critical discussion of religion.
- Broad and undefined offences of criminal defamation and insult.
- A 5-day notification period for assemblies, with a burdensome notifications procedure and significant discretion upon authorities to ban or move planned assemblies.
- A failure to guarantee spontaneous demonstrations or counter-demonstrations.
- Severe restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly rights of NGOs that receive foreign funds.

ARTICLE 19's concerns regarding the Draft Law are joined by concerns about a second draft law under consideration that threatens to considerably restrict the functioning of civil society organisations.

This includes broad and ambiguous limits on the types of issues that CSOs are allowed to work on, and may eliminate the legal basis for the work of human rights organisations. It also discriminates against and dramatically curtails the operation of foreign organisations, requiring prior government approval for their work; places severe restrictions on domestic CSOs receiving foreign funds, and gives broad powers to governments to dissolve CSOs.

“The draft law restricting civil society is also deeply troubling, and threatens to add to an environment where there is decreasing space for NGOs to operate independently or freely. It is alarming enough that Mubarak-era practices to stifle free speech continue, but that the current legislature are seeking to add to this arsenal of measures to crack-down on dissent is deeply disturbing” Callamard concluded.

ARTICLE 19 urges the Shura Council to amend both draft laws in line with international standards.

ARTICLE 19's analysis of the draft law "*relating to the regulation of the right to demonstrate in public spaces*" is available to download below.

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## DOWNLOADS

- [Egypt: Freedom of peaceful assembly law](#)