

Egypt hands down harsh sentences against activists in Cairo and Alexandria

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Report. The pro-democracy movement and left-wing activists find themselves on the defensive against a judiciary bent on stamping out dissent.

Trials in Egypt on Dec. 30 resulted in over 20 convictions with years in prison and heavy fines against the accused, many of whom were pro-democracy and left-wing activists, in three different courts in Cairo and Alexandria.

Mahienour El-Massry, a young human rights lawyer, received a sentence of two years in prison. It was the same for Moatasem Medhat of the Bread and Freedom Party, while another three activists, convicted in absentia, were sentenced to three years each.

The convictions concern the June 14 protests in Alexandria against the agreement that gave two islands, Tiran and Sanafir, to Saudi Arabia. That deal sparked so much outrage that it triggered new manifestations, in spite of a law that de facto prohibits all protests. During the court hearing itself, the police arrested three more people who had improvised a sit-in outside the courthouse in solidarity.

Meanwhile, in Cairo, a criminal court sentenced twenty other defendants accused of “insulting the judiciary” to fines of 30,000 Egyptian lira (\$1,700), and in addition ordered each to pay a compensation of one million Egyptian lira (\$56,000) to the head of the Egyptian Judges’ Club, an independent organization to which 90 percent of Egyptian judges belong. One of those convicted was Alaa Abdel Fattah, an engineer and blogger, one of the leading figures of the 2011 revolution.

He was convicted for events dating back to September 2012, when the Muslim Brotherhood was in power. Ironically enough, during the very same hearing the court sentenced dozens of Brotherhood members as well, including leading figures such as former President Morsi and former Supreme Guide Badie. Alaa has already served three and a half years of a sentence of five years he received for a protest in 2013, after a trial that, according to his lawyers, was full of abuses.

Wednesday, another important decision by a Cairo court is expected regarding the appeal filed by Khaled Ali, lawyer and leader of the leftist Bread and Freedom Party, who recently launched his candidacy for the presidential elections of 2018.

Ali was convicted for committing an “obscene gesture” in court after the historic victory against the government’s deal regarding the Tiran and Sanafir islands. Beside the risk of jail time, if his appeal is rejected Ali could lose the right to be a candidate in the coming elections.

His decision to run, although it brought the disapproval of many activists who are favoring a boycott, also rekindled the hopes of so many people, especially young, who are deeply discouraged by the difficult period of counter-revolution that the country finds itself in. His exclusion would eliminate the only truly left-wing option, and the only one that is in continuity with the slogans of the 2011

revolution.

The democratic and progressive front in Egypt is in the situation of having to fight a defensive battle, marked by trials and convictions, in order to ensure its survival on the political as well as human level.

And, since Italy is aiming at the normalization of relations and expecting a little bonus in the Regeni case, absolutely no condemnation has been heard from any of the institutions of our country against the el Sisi regime's stranglehold on any and all voice of dissent.

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<https://global.ilmanifesto.it/egypt-hands-down-harsh-sentences-against-activists/>