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الأورو-متوسطية للحقوق

Copenhagen, 19 August 2019

## OPEN LETTER TO UN HIGH COMMISSIONER BACHELET

### Why EuroMed Rights will not attend OHCHR Regional Conference on Torture in Cairo

Dear UN High Commissioner Bachelet,

While EuroMed Rights appreciates the invitation to attend the regional conference on “Defining and Criminalizing Torture in Legislation in the Arab Region” in Cairo, Egypt, from 4 to 5 September 2019, we have deep reservations about the decision to hold this conference in Egypt, a country where torture is systematically practised by the security forces, and in collaboration with the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights, which acts under the auspices of the government. In light of this, and due to the reasons set out below, EuroMed Rights respectfully declines the invitation.

Detainees and prisoners in Egypt are frequently subjected to abuses which amount to torture, [including](#) electric shocks, beatings, suspension by limbs and rape. In July 2019, Amnesty International [reported](#) that around 130 detainees at the infamous “Scorpion” prison had been on hunger strike for more than six weeks, protesting the abysmal conditions and human rights abuses that they undergo; and the Committee for Justice [documented](#) 120 cases of torture in 2018. Confessions from suspects are [reportedly](#) often obtained under torture, and few allegations of abuse are ever investigated, leading to a lack of accountability for perpetrators. In June 2017, the United Nations Committee Against Torture reached the “inescapable conclusion that torture is a systematic practice in Egypt”.

Independent human rights organisations and human rights defenders working on torture in Egypt face ongoing pressure and attacks from the authorities. In 2017, the El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims was [closed](#) by the authorities and one of its co-founders, [Suzanne Fayyad](#), was banned from travelling as she attempted to board a flight to Tunisia to attend a conference on the rehabilitation of child torture victims. Negad El Borai, a human rights lawyer and director of the law firm United Group for Law, has been arrested and summoned on five occasions since, in March 2015, the High Judicial Council filed a complaint against him and two judges for drafting a law for the prevention of torture in Egypt. While Egypt’s remaining independent human rights organisations have prepared a submission on torture for the upcoming Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2019, many of them will be prevented by the Egyptian authorities from travelling to Geneva to attend the session.

The Egyptian authorities also repeatedly use reprisals against human rights defenders who cooperate with regional and international agencies, including UN bodies and mechanisms. In September 2017, the founder of the League of Families of the Disappeared, Ibrahim Metwally, was [detained](#) at Cairo airport on route to Geneva upon invitation from the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances. Mr Metwally remains in pre-trial detention to this date. Likewise, in October 2018, Egyptian citizens who had been in contact with the UN special rapporteur on adequate housing were subjected to

various forms of harassment and reprisals in what UN experts subsequently [described](#) as “an alarming pattern”.

Due to the above, EuroMed Rights estimates that it will not be possible to engage genuinely with civil society at the conference in Cairo. EuroMed Rights also estimates that the security of human rights defenders and international observers cannot be properly guaranteed. We therefore believe that any participation in the conference from our side would render us complicit in the Egyptian authorities’ attempt to detract attention from its deplorable human rights record ahead of Egypt’s UPR in November 2019.

Yours sincerely,



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Executive Director



Wadih al-Asmar  
President