

## The Dangers of Egypt's NGO Law

On November 29, 2016, the Egyptian Parliament voted overwhelmingly to pass a [draconian new NGO law](#).<sup>\*</sup> The legislation, which President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ratified on May 29, 2017, contravenes international human rights standards and Egypt's own constitution. The law is even more repressive than Egypt's previous NGO Law (84/2002). This new law could make it impossible for many Egyptian and international NGOs to operate and is a troubling step in al-Sisi's campaign to crush human rights activity and tighten security control over all of civil society.

Parliament rushed the law through without any meaningful consultation with civil society. Members of the quasi-official National Council for Human Rights, as well as numerous Egyptian NGOs, have [harshly criticized](#) the [law](#). U.S. Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) [strongly objected](#) to the legislation, as have the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and many international [organizations](#).

**The law tightens government powers over local NGOs.** The law requires all citizen organizations to undergo an onerous registration process or be deemed illegal. It expands authorities' powers to intrude into NGO operations, allowing them to reject internal management decisions and inspect documents and activities at will. Cooperation with "any local or foreign entity" is illegal without explicit permission. Courts, which often lack independence, could dissolve NGOs with no right of appeal.

**The law imposes potentially crippling constraints on funding.** All funding from donors outside Egypt—support crucial to many NGOs, especially human rights organizations critical of the government—has to be approved by a new "National Authority for Regulating International NGOs" that includes security, defense, and intelligence officials. NGOs could not spend even domestic donations without explicit permission.

**The law criminalizes peaceful, legitimate civic activism.** NGOs are allowed to conduct only "social development" work in line with Egypt's official development plan. The law prohibits activities the state deems "political" or "harmful to national security." Public opinion surveys, "field research," and publication of reports are illegal without prior approval. Criminal punishments are even harsher than those in Law 84. Carrying out "political" activities, accepting foreign funding, or simply conducting research could result in five years in prison and a fine of up to 1 million Egyptian Pounds (about \$55,000). The law also permits authorities to apply even more drastic punishments found in the penal code, including *life imprisonment* for receiving foreign funding "harmful to the national interest."

**The law places even greater restrictions on foreign NGOs.** Foreign NGOs require prior approval from the National Authority to operate in Egypt. They have to purchase a \$20,000 permit; this fee would increase by 20 percent every five years. Foreign NGO activities deemed "political," conflicting with the national development plan, or "harmful to national security" are illegal. Cooperation with Egyptian organizations is prohibited without government permission.

**The law conflicts with Egypt's constitution, international democratic norms, and the pledges Egypt made during its 2014 UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review.** The law appears to violate Article 75 of the Constitution, and contravenes the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Egypt [ratified in 1982](#). Contrary to Egyptian government [assertions](#) [Ar], the law bears zero resemblance to Western democracies' NGO laws, which help civil society flourish, not criminalize it.

<sup>\*</sup> For background, see inter alia: International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), "Information Update: Egyptian Parliament approves restrictive new draft CSO law," November 2016; Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), "Egypt: A Letter and Legal Memorandum to the President: Demanding the Repeal of the NGO Law," December 2016, <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=19328&lang=en>