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EGYPT | Human Rights Defender Arrested

Mina Thabet, a human rights activist specializing in Coptic and Minority rights, was arrested May 19 at his home in the early hours of the morning by plainclothes police officers.

Thabet is Minority Rights Program Director at the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF). He was arrested at his home at 3.30 a.m. on May 19 and taken away in an unmarked car. Earlier in the day, a national security agent visited Thabet's family and made enquiries about him. Thabet is in police detention after being charged with belonging to a terrorist group, inciting violence and public assembly, spreading fabricated information for terrorist purposes, inciting attacks on police stations, and possession of leaflets undermining national security and the ruling regime.

The evidence against Thabet reportedly includes an introductory paper on the Bread and Freedom Party, a notebook containing Virgin Mary pictures and documents on international law relating to the rights of minorities.

The ECRF's work includes a focus on minority rights, including the Coptic community, and Thabet has worked on several cases, including the Coptic students from El Minya province who were convicted of blasphemy and related charges in February.

Thabet's arrest is part of an intensified crackdown on NGOs and human rights defenders in Egypt that has resulted in the arrests of human rights defenders across the country and the imposition of multiple travel bans and asset freezes. In June 2015, Mohamed Lofty, the Executive Director of the ECRF was detained and had his passport confiscated in Cairo airport as he attempted to travel to Germany.

The President of the Board of the ECRF, Ahmed Abdallah, was arrested at his home in April and faces the same charges as Mina Thabet. The continued targeting of human rights defenders has been condemned by United States Secretary of State, the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Federal Foreign Office in Germany and the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “We are deeply concerned by the arrest of Mina Thabet and the worrying crackdown on civil society and human rights defenders. Egypt undoubtedly faces an unprecedented terrorist threat that sometimes necessitates extraordinary measures; however human rights defenders ought to be viewed as allies in the effort to create a just and equitable society and accountable governance. Mr. Thabet and the ECRF perform invaluable work in highlighting the difficulties encountered by minority groups and assisting victims of violations to seek redress. We urge the authorities to ensure that he receives due process and it is our hope that the exaggerated charges filed against him are dropped. We further call upon the Egyptian authorities to adhere to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which Egypt supported in 1998, which says that States should guarantee the rights of individuals, including in association with others, to promote and protect fundamental freedoms, which is what Mr. Thabet and his colleagues are doing.”