Joint Statement - 7 June 2015 - <http://nazra.org/en/node/415>

**"Insulting the Ministry of Interior" is One of the Charges that Result in the Imprisonment of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and Activists**

The ElRaml Appeal Misdemeanor Court issued a verdict on 31 May 2015 of imprisonment against women human rights defender (WHRD) and lawyer Mahienour El-Massry and other activists, namely Youssef Shaaban and Loay ElKahwagy, for 15 months in the case known as "ElRaml Police Station", for 3 charges including "insulting the Ministry of Interior". The case dates back to an incident that occurred on 30 March 2013 when one of the Muslim Brotherhood members attacked an activist and took him to ElRaml Police Station, accusing him of attempting to torch one of the Muslim Brotherhood premises. A group of lawyers then went to the concerned police station to defend him, and a dispute took place which resulted in an attempted sit-in at the police station by the lawyers and they were attacked and detained for one day. On 9 February 2015, the ElRaml Misdemeanor Court issued a verdict of 2 years imprisonment against Mahienour El-Massry, Youssef Shaaban, Loay ElKahwagy and 7 other activists, in addition to a fine amounting to EGP5000. In the appeal verdict issued on 31 May 2015, the court decided to imprison the concerned WHRD and activists, based on 3 charges out of 5 as follows: 1) Rallying in front of ElRaml Police Station and inside it (6 months); 2) Attempting to vandalize contents of police station and police van (innocent); 3) Attacking Police officers and staff (6 months); 4) Insulting the Ministry of Interior (3 months); and 5) Obstructing the workflow of ElRaml Police Station (innocent).

The undersigned organizations and groups condemn the aforementioned verdict, and consider it an insistence from the state to continue punishing WHRDs and activists, by using loose accusations that usually lack evidence and proof, and they are used in this type of cases to punish WHRDs and activists for expressing their opinions regarding violations that take place by both state and non-state actors, in order to shrink the public space and send a clear message that revolves around being silent about these violations, and render state institutions and the Ministry of Interior untouchable.

It is worth mentioning that this is the second time in less than a year where WHRD Mahienour El-Massry has been sentenced, as she was previously sentenced to [2 years imprisonment](http://nazra.org/en/node/316) in the cases known as "Khaled Said Trial Stand", which was organized by a number of WHRDs, HRDs and political activists during the court session of the trial for one of the police staff members being accused of torturing and killing Khaled Said. The WHRDs, HRDs and activists were charged with breaching the Protest and Public Assembly Law, and were sentenced to 2 years imprisonment by the Sidi Gaber Misdemeanor Court in May 2014, which the Sidi Gaber Appeal Misdemeanor Court amended to be 6 months imprisonment, and Mahienour El-Massry was released after the submission of a demur in September 2014 until the Court of Cassation processes the case.

The undersigned organization state that there is an inclination for security authorities to fabricate a number of cases against WHRDs, HRDs and political activists, even if it reaches the extent of resorting to incidents that are extremely outdated, so they can be used anytime to imprison them. Unfortunately, investigating bodies and courts are complicit in this process by conducting investigations that rely only on police investigations or ignoring guarantees for a fair trial and violating the rights of the defense in court sessions.

The undersigned organizations and groups also demand the Court of Cassation to promptly process the case bearing in mind the law violations that took place in the appeal court, to acquit those imprisoned in the concerned case immediately, to adhere to the Egyptian Constitution that guarantees the right to a fair trial based on clear evidence and proof, open the public space for WHRDs and HRDs to conduct activities that respect ensuring human rights based on their belief in these rights, undertake the necessary measures and processes that render them citizens keen on ensuring rights and freedom for everyone, respect the activities they conduct to assert justice in the country, in addition to respecting the conventions and international mechanisms and covenants that include the Universal Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and the United Nations 2013 Resolution on Women Human Rights Defenders that ensure their right to activism in the public space and condemns their targeting.

**Signed Organizations and Groups:**

1. Nazra for Feminist Studies

2. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

3. Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Non-Violence Studies

4. Appropriate Communication Techniques for Development Center (ACT)

5. Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE)

6. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

7. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA)

8. ElNadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture

9. Hisham Mubarak Law Center

10. The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR)