Journalists go on trial in Egypt for ‘offending MPs’

March 7, 2023

By [Ruth Michaelson](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/ruth-michaelson)

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/07/journalists-go-on-trial-in-egypt-for-offending-mps>

Three journalists from Egypt’s last remaining independent news outlet have gone on trial in Cairo on charges of misusing social media and offending members of parliament.

Rana Mamdouh, Sara Seif Eddin and Beesan Kassab, who work for the Mada Masr news platform, face up to two years in prison and fines of 300,000 EGP (£8,100) if the court convicts them.

The trial stems from a complaint issued by the Nation’s Future party over a Mada Masr story published last August that revealed how a government watchdog had discovered examples of “gross financial misconduct” among leading party members.

In the weeks that followed, [the outlet said](https://www.madamasr.com/en/2022/09/04/news/u/nations-future-party-members-file-dozens-of-legal-complaints-against-3-mada-masr-journalists/), Nation’s Future MPs deluged the three journalists and Mada Masr’s editor in chief, Lina Attalah, with dozens of identical legal complaints filed at police stations across Egypt, leading to the interrogation of Mada Masr journalists across the country.

Prosecutors in Cairo also summoned all four journalists for questioning about their sources and the outlet’s operations, accusing them of “spreading false news”, “offending members of parliament”, defaming Nation’s Future MPs, “deliberately disturbing” the MPs, and “operating an unlicensed website.”

Nation’s Future, a powerful political party that holds a majority in both houses of Egypt’s “rubber stamp” parliament, was set up with the sole aim of supporting the policies of the Egyptian president, Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi.

Under Sisi, who swept to power in a military coup in 2013, Egyptian authorities at every level have worked to crush freedom of the press and dissent. Reporters Without Borders calls Egypt “one of the world’s biggest prisons for journalists”, [ranking it](https://rsf.org/en/country/egypt) 168th out of 180 countries worldwide in terms of press freedom.

Attalah maintains that she is solely responsible for the story on Nation’s Future, and that the three journalists on trial wrote only a summary of the story for the outlet’s daily newsletter.

“We will be present before judicial authorities as requested, despite the transgressions upon the freedom of the press entailed in the legal steps that have been taken so far, and the fact that they override alternative routes to accountability that would impinge less on press freedoms,” Attalah said [in a statement posted on social media](https://twitter.com/MadaMasr/status/1632745369992830979?s=20) on Monday.

Mada Masr and Attalah have also weathered repeated attacks by the Egyptian state, including a [raid on their offices in Cairo](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/24/egypts-security-forces-raid-online-newspapers-office-in-cairo) by plainclothes security officers in 2019, the arrest of multiple staff members and prolonged efforts by the authorities to block their website.

Observers said the case against Mada Masr and its journalists marked yet another round of attacks on the outlet, and a further message to media attempting to work inside the country.

“This judicial harassment is a clear attack on journalists and the independent press in Egypt,” [said](https://cpj.org/2023/03/trial-to-start-tuesday-for-3-mada-masr-journalists-in-egypt/) Sherif Mansour of the Committee to Protect Journalists.