

Cast Into the Abyss

Untold stories of civilians swallowed by
secret detention centres in Sinai



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SINAI

Foundation for Human Rights

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Executive Summary

“Now that terrorism’s over in North Sinai, it’s my basic right to know where my son is-whether he’s alive or dead. I don’t mind sending telegrams to any government office in Egypt, or a complaint to the UN, or anything-even if they arrest me. What, are they going to stop me from looking for my own son too?”

The father of one of the forcibly disappeared

“There are nine core international human rights treaties, and Egypt is a party to eight of them. The only treaty Egypt has not joined is the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The crime of enforced disappearance carries extremely negative connotations and implications. However, this could be addressed, and such accusations could be removed from our record.”

Ambassador Moushira Khattab, former president of the National Council for Human Rights in Egypt¹

In November of 2024, the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA), affiliated with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), responsible for assessing institutions’ compliance with the Paris Principles, adopted its recommendations to downgrade the National Council for Human Rights in Egypt to B status, expressing serious concerns about the Council’s lack of independence, effectiveness, and transparency, as well as its failure to address issues such as enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests.²

Over the past decade, the Egyptian state has pursued a systematic policy of oppressive security measures in the Sinai Peninsula, most notably through sweeping campaigns of arbitrary arrests that have targeted thousands of men, women, and children. Many of those detained were subjected to brutal torture during varying periods of enforced disappearance. Some eventually resurfaced in prisons or returned to their families, others were extrajudicially killed, while many remain unaccounted for, with their families still unaware whether they are alive or dead. All of this formed part of the security approach adopted by the authorities and the military in their confrontation with armed Islamist groups since 2013.

¹ Moushira Khattab: The good reputation of the state in the field of human rights is an attraction for foreign investments, Shorouk News, 12 May

<https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=12052025&id=fe366ee2-e89d-44a4-b1ae-c6175d89373e>

² Welcoming the Downgrade of Egypt’s National Council for Human Rights to Grade B, Committee for Justice, 21 November 2024

<https://www.cfjustice.org/welcoming-the-downgrade-of-egypts-national-council-for-human-rights-to-grade-b/>



This report documents 82 ongoing cases of enforced disappearance, representing a portion of the 863 cases of individuals whose fate remains unknown to this day, as recorded by the organisation in its various reports over the years. This figure does not constitute a comprehensive tally of all those forcibly disappeared in Sinai, but rather reflects the cases that the organisation has been able to verify and document.

Meanwhile, a representative sample of activists and tribal figures in Sinai estimate that the number of forcibly disappeared persons ranges between 3,000 and 3,500, based on a methodology that involved engaging the local community in assessing the scale of the phenomenon for the purposes of this report. Additionally, one of the interviews conducted by the organisation with the father of a forcibly disappeared person revealed that the serial number assigned to his son's details by an initiative affiliated with the Al-Waseem Charitable Association (A civil society organisation linked to businessman Ibrahim Al-Argani, known for his close ties to the military and intelligence agencies) was 2,870.

These policies did not emerge overnight; rather, they are rooted in a long history of repressive security practices against the local population, which became clearly visible after the Taba and Ras Shaitan bombings on 7 October 2004. The attacks killed 34 people and injured over 100 others, including tourists and local residents. In response, the Egyptian authorities launched wide-scale arrest campaigns across North Sinai. On 25 October 2004, the Ministry of Interior announced that it had identified nine suspects: five were already in custody, two had reportedly been killed during the attack, and the remaining two were still at large.³

Despite the limited number of individuals officially accused of carrying out the attacks, Egyptian authorities arrested over 2,400 local residents at the time. Human rights reports by Egyptian and international organisations stated that these arrests were arbitrary and abusive, violating the law, as they were not limited to suspects but extended to their relatives, including women and children, in what resembled collective punishment. Hundreds of detainees were subjected to enforced disappearance in unofficial or undisclosed detention sites for prolonged periods without judicial supervision or any means of contacting the outside world. This stark disparity between the actual number of accused and the scale of mass arrests reflects a longstanding security approach based on broad suspicion and collective punishment, which led to grave human rights violations.

A 2005 report issued by Human Rights Watch on the mass arrests and torture following the 2004 Taba bombings presented credible evidence that detainees were subjected to systematic torture, particularly at State Security Investigation facilities. The report documented the use of severe methods such as electric shocks, severe beatings, and suspension by the limbs. It stated that Torture was systematic in State Security facilities during interrogations, with consistent reports of the use

³ Egypt: Mass Arrests and Torture in Sinai, Human Rights Watch, 21 February 2005
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/02/21/egypt-mass-arrests-and-torture-sinai>



of electric shocks, beatings, and suspension. The report also noted that these grave violations were committed with impunity, as no investigations were opened against the security officials involved, and no one was held accountable. Meanwhile, Egyptian human rights organisations reported that security forces arrested around 3,000 individuals, including several hundred who were detained solely to pressure wanted relatives into surrendering themselves.⁴

These facts reflect that since 2004, and possibly even earlier, the Egyptian state has regarded the Sinai Peninsula as a perpetual security risk, thereby legitimising repressive security policies that expanded after 2013. Although the context and the groups involved in the violence differed between the two periods, the state relied in both instances on the same security approach—based on exceptional laws and systematic violations of rights. What was initially implemented as exceptional measures following the 2004 Taba bombings transformed, since 2013, into an institutionalised system of repression, wherein practices such as enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings became systematic, amid a complete absence of accountability and the continual expansion of the security agencies' authority.

What is striking in the comparison between the two periods is that the level of violence and the nature of the violations remained fundamentally unchanged; however, they became more widespread and sustained after 2013. This was accompanied by the weakening of the role of the civilian judiciary and the increasing involvement of military courts in trying civilians, thereby providing a legal cover for these violations. This comparison reflects a progression from a temporary state of repression following a security attack to an entrenched authoritarian model characterised by the excessive use of force and systematic enforced disappearance, all occurring amid a lack of transparency, oversight, and accountability. This situation places the Egyptian state under serious legal and ethical obligations towards the victims.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, Report on Mass Arrests and Torture, 21 February 2005 (same as previous reference)



As part of this report, the foundation's researchers created a database based on a review and analysis of official data issued by the spokesperson of the Egyptian Armed Forces during the period of military operations spanning from 2013 to 2022. These data revealed that the Armed Forces announced the killing of 5,053 individuals described as "terrorist elements," and the arrest of 14,837 others suspected of belonging to armed groups. These official figures starkly contradict estimates of the number of militants affiliated with extremist groups in Sinai, which ranged, according to the West Point Counterterrorism Center (CTC), between 1,000 and 1,500 members as of mid-2018, while the RAND Corporation estimated them at merely "several hundred." This discrepancy raises fundamental questions about the fate of thousands of detainees whose place of detention or ultimate fate remains unknown to this day.⁵

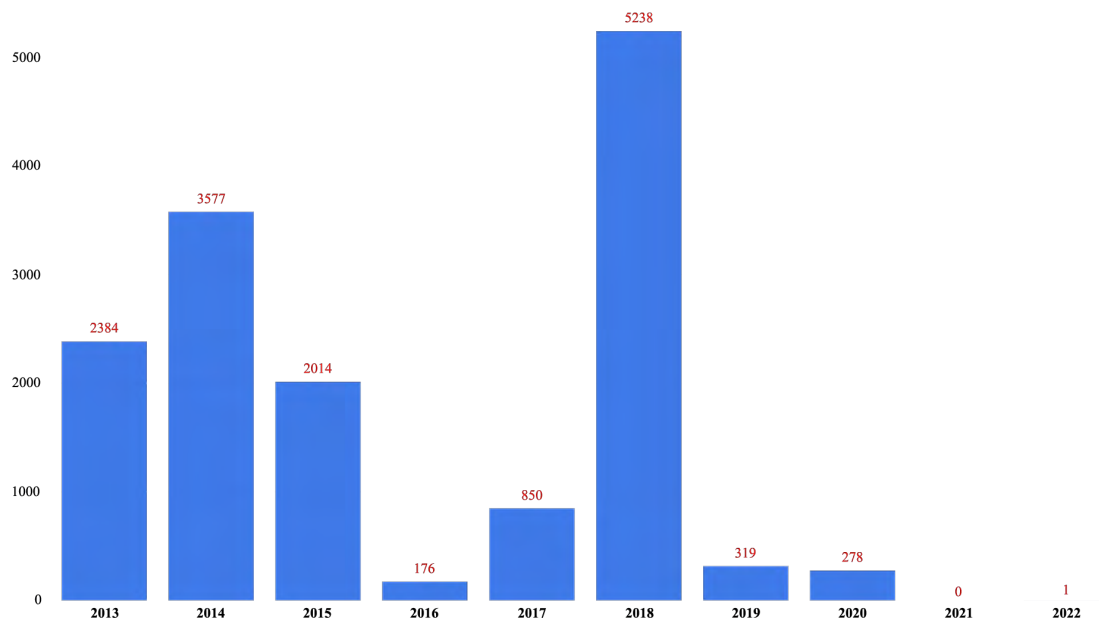
It is worth noting that these figures do not include data issued by the Egyptian Ministry of Interior, which in turn accounts for a significant portion of arrests and extrajudicial killings. For example, on 15 March 2018, the Interior Ministry's spokesperson announced that, during the period from February 9 to March 15, 2018 (only 35 days), police forces had "screened 52,164 individuals, who were apprehended based on suspicion and released those whose position was deemed sound," without specifying the number of those actually released. This clearly indicates the expansion of detention campaigns based on suspicion, without providing clarity on how many individuals were in fact released. This clearly points to the arbitrary and widespread nature of suspicion-based arrests, and reinforces concerns about the fate of an unknown number of individuals in the absence of transparency and accountability.⁶

⁵ Report titled "The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells Across the Continent", Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point, August 2018 <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/islamic-state-africa-estimating-fighter-numbers-cells-across-continent/>

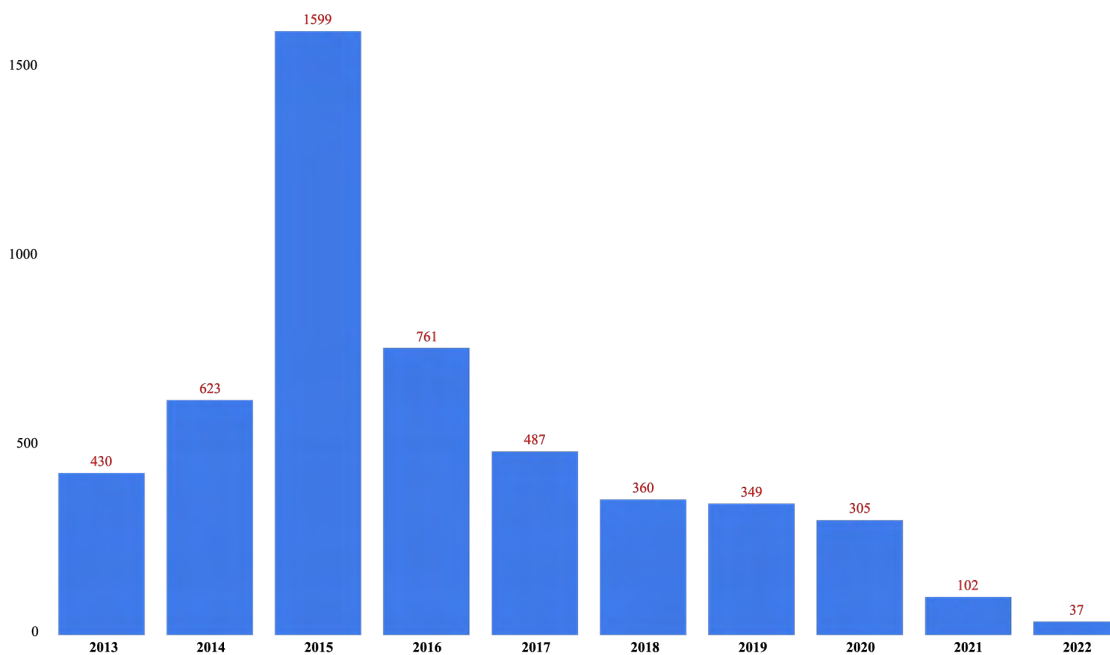
⁶ A visual report on security efforts in Sinai, published on the official Facebook page of the Ministry of Interior, 15 March 2018 <https://www.facebook.com/MoiEgy/posts/pfbid02iX1yPSSWgcbHKWK9m557ASGXocp6ujMdz9uN8DHXEJfJyDuZgwniMCSchz5d5DGtl>

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A column chart illustrating the number of detainees reported by the military spokesperson between 2013 and 2022.



A column chart illustrating the number of fatalities reported by the military spokesperson during the same period.



Methodology: how do we answer the question?

How many have they lost in the depths of the abyss?

The Sinai Human Rights Foundation sought to develop an approximate quantitative estimate of the number of individuals subjected to enforced disappearance in North Sinai Governorate during the period of armed conflict (2013–2023) and the subsequent years up to 2025, whose fate remains unknown as of the publication date of this report. To achieve this, the Foundation adopted a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach based on conducting interviews with a sample of 42 local and tribal activists representing various villages and centres across the governorate. In selecting participants, the Foundation ensured balanced geographical and tribal representation, so that the sample encompassed the widest possible diversity of areas and local tribes. It was also required that participants possess sufficient knowledge of the human rights and social context in their regions and maintain direct or indirect relationships with victims' families or community actors involved in the matter. It is noteworthy that several interviewees were part of informal initiatives with partial governmental endorsement, which sought to uncover the fate of the disappeared through communication between clan elders—chosen by the authorities—and the security agencies, and involved the provision of lists of missing persons within their community vicinity.

Based on this cumulative, multi-source approach, the Sinai Foundation concluded that estimates derived from a representative sample of the local community regarding the scale of enforced disappearance cases that occurred during the conflict period—and whose victims' fate remains unknown—fall within a numerical range of between 3,000 and 3,500 cases. This figure does not include those whose fate is known to the families, whether imprisonment or death. This estimated number is based on the analysis of intersecting field data rather than on individual case enumeration. This methodology represents an alternative method through which the Foundation sought to ascertain the magnitude of the problem from the perspective of the local community, given the lack of official transparency and the difficulty of direct access to some affected areas.

One of the interviews conducted by the Foundation with the father of an enforced disappearance victim indicated that the serial number assigned to his son's data in an initiative affiliated with Al-Waseem Charitable Association—a civil society organization linked to the businessman Ibrahim Al-Arjani, who is close to the military and intelligence agencies—was 2870. He stated:

"I submitted telegrams and faxes to the Presidency of the Republic and the Prime Minister's Office, but to no avail. I also presented them to our parliamentary representatives, yet there was no progress. I submitted to the Al-Waseem Association of Ibrahim Al-Arjani and received no response. I followed up again after about four months, and they said if they received any information, they would inform me. It is noteworthy that my son's registration number with the Al-Waseem



Association was 2870. Can you imagine how many young people there are whose families are searching for them?”⁷

Over years of monitoring events in Sinai, the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights has been able to directly document 863 cases of enforced disappearance in the Sinai Peninsula, the fate of whom remains unknown at the time of preparing this report, including 82 cases documented within this report itself. This figure represents the total number of cases and complaints documented by the foundation since its establishment in October 2020 until the time of publication. These cases underwent a rigorous verification process, which included gathering testimonies from victims’ families or eyewitnesses, reviewing complaints submitted to the prosecution and official bodies - where available- as well as verifying dates, potential places of detention, and the context of the disappearance. This number constitutes one of the most accurate and comprehensive documented databases concerning enforced disappearances in the region to date. However, it reflects only a portion of the phenomenon and does not represent the total number of individuals subjected to enforced disappearance in the Sinai Peninsula. The preparation of this database took approximately five years, with the team working on it from the foundation’s establishment in October 2020 until mid-2025.

This report is based on fieldwork conducted by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights and includes documentation of 82 cases of enforced disappearance in which the fate of the individuals remains unknown at the time of publication, as well as 16 cases of individuals who survived enforced disappearance.

The documentation draws on 91 in-depth interviews and phone conversations⁸ conducted with relatives of those who remain forcibly disappeared and with survivors or their family members—some of whom are still held in pre-trial detention or serving prison sentences. Additional interviews were carried out with one human rights lawyer and two local activists, between October 2020 and June 2025. In many cases, researchers from the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights were able to review official complaints and reports submitted to the Public Prosecution and other authorities, which were provided by the relatives of the victims.

The foundation's researchers also developed a database based on the review and analysis of official data issued by the spokesperson of the Egyptian Armed Forces related to counterterrorism operations in the Sinai Peninsula, covering the period from 2013 to the end of 2022. The database aimed to track patterns of reported arrests and killings, and to compare them with independent estimates of the number of armed group members, in order to identify discrepancies and potential indicators of possible violations.

⁷ A telephone call, July 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

⁸ These interviews are separate from the 42 interviews with local tribal actors aforementioned



In addition, the foundation reviewed a 12-page report issued by the semi-official National Council for Human Rights, which included a set of summary recommendations. The report was published following the Council's fact-finding mission to North Sinai, which took place between 31 January and 4 February 2021.⁹ The foundation also reviewed a governmental report dated 27 June 2020¹⁰, which addressed the efforts undertaken by the authorities to compensate those affected by the security confrontations between the parties to the conflict in North Sinai during the period from 1 October 2015 to 31 May 2020. Furthermore, a legal study titled "Human Rights and the Confrontation of Terrorist Groups", prepared by the Deputy President of the Court of Cassation, Counsellor Adel Maged, was examined. The study addressed the position of human rights within the framework of the Comprehensive Operation Sinai 2018.¹¹

While preparing this report, the Foundation's researchers reviewed dozens of news articles published by local and international media outlets, as well as civil society organisations, concerning the situation in North Sinai. In addition, the Foundation examined official statements from the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, the official spokespersons for the army and the interior ministry, the Governor of North Sinai, and other officials from various governmental bodies. The Foundation also reviewed Facebook posts published by members of the Egyptian House of Representatives relating to North Sinai. Furthermore, comprehensive reviews were conducted of both international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Sinai Foundation for Human Rights sent letters in June 2025 to the Egyptian Minister of Defense, the Egyptian Minister of Interior, the National Council for Human Rights, and the State Information Service. These letters included detailed questions covering all documented patterns of violations. However, no responses have been received to date. Any responses received after the publication of the report will be made publicly available on the Sinai Foundation's website.

The Foundation, along with most human rights organisations, faces significant field and security challenges that hinder access to many victims, especially in light of the official media blackout and the authorities' refusal to disclose any records related to individuals held in extrajudicial detention in Sinai. The difficulty of documenting violations in North Sinai stems from a complex set of factors linked to the region's unique security, geographic, and social context. North Sinai has been the main stronghold of terrorist operations over the past years, making any attempt to

⁹ Al-Masry Al-Youm publishes the National Council for Human Rights' report on North Sinai, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 10 February 2021 <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2253991>

¹⁰ Madbouli reviews report to compensate N. Sinai residents affected by security operations, State Information Service, 27 June 2020 <https://beta.sis.gov.eg/en/media-center/news/pm-reviews-report-to-compensate-n-sinai-residents-affected-by-security-operations/>

¹¹ SIS: Comprehensive Operation Sinai 2018 'model' of human rights commitment, State Information Service, 11 July 2018 <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/132234/SIS-Comprehensive-Operation-Sinai-2018-'model'-of-human-rights-commitment?lang=en-us>



monitor violations an exceptionally difficult and risky task. The Foundation's team has faced numerous challenges, which can be summarised as follows:

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- **A prevailing lack of trust in the effectiveness of engaging with journalists or human rights activists**, as a significant number of local residents do not believe in the efficacy of such channels in achieving justice or uncovering the fate of their relatives. This scepticism stems from previous experiences they perceive as having yielded no tangible results, further increasing hesitation to provide information or cooperate with monitoring and documentation teams.
- **The geographical isolation of certain areas**, which results in logistical difficulties in reaching and communicating with local communities, undermines the ability to conduct thorough investigations or gather reliable testimonies regarding cases of enforced disappearance. This challenge is compounded by the widespread and complex nature of the phenomenon, making it exceedingly difficult to accurately document its scope.
- **The unique nature of Sinai's society**, given its tribal structure, means that engaging with outsiders and placing trust in their intentions constitutes a persistent obstacle. This renders access to information an additional challenge, requiring a high degree of sensitivity and a deep understanding of the local community's social fabric.
- **The escalation of security campaigns and the expansion of violence** in Sinai have fostered a general atmosphere of caution and reticence among the local population in their approach to any human rights or media organisations, particularly in light of the accompanying arbitrary practices. This has led to a shrinking of the public sphere and an increased apprehension about providing any information.



- **The interwoven nature of familial and kinship ties**, with individuals in almost every family having direct or indirect connections to security agencies, further complicates the ability of the relatives of the disappeared to disclose details about the disappearance of their loved ones. This may be due to fear or as a result of unofficial promises made to them through these connections to resolve the matter quietly without public attention.
- **Fear of reprisals**, as many local residents refrain from documenting violations or speaking about them publicly out of concern for retaliatory actions by the authorities, particularly in the absence of effective legal protection mechanisms.
- **Fear of visiting detention facilities** to inquire about the fate of the disappeared, out of concern that such visits could lead to their own arrest or subject them to security questioning, prompting some families to remain completely silent.
- **A concern for the safety of the remaining male members of the family**, with many families preferring not to take any steps that might provoke security reactions against their other sons.
- **Economic and living pressures**, which weaken the ability of many families to follow up on their relatives' cases or continue demanding their rights, whether due to being preoccupied with securing the bare minimum for daily life, or because they are unable to bear the financial costs associated with legal and administrative follow-up.
- **The multiplicity of security agencies involved in the armed conflict**, whether affiliated with the army or the police, and the absence of coordination or information-sharing between them, has led to further suffering for families. Some agencies demand that families provide proof that the victim was arrested by another security body—a condition that is practically impossible to fulfil. This unreasonable burden has driven many families to complete silence, or even to relocate in search of safety and to avoid any contact that might put them at risk.

These challenges illustrate the extent of the complexity facing human rights work in North Sinai, while also highlighting the courage of those who, despite such circumstances, have managed to break the barrier of fear and contribute to the documentation of these crimes.

This report seeks to shed light on the phenomenon of enforced disappearance in North Sinai—the geographical area most exposed to violations and the centre of terrorist operations over the past decade. The report is divided into two main chapters:

- The **first chapter** addresses the phenomenon of enforced disappearance from the perspective of the victims themselves. It is based on interviews with survivors of enforced



disappearance or former detainees who spent time in detention alongside the victims and conveyed their accounts to us, as well as testimonies from the families of the disappeared who managed to communicate with their loved ones during specific periods of the disappearance journey through smuggled messages or intermediaries. This chapter presents their narratives, starting from the moment of arbitrary arrest, through their detention in unofficial sites, to their exposure to torture and ill-treatment.

- The **second chapter** documents the exhausting journey undertaken by families in search of their disappeared relatives, starting with their fear of filing official reports or their complete lack of knowledge about legal procedures, moving through incidents of emotional manipulation and financial exploitation driven by their desperate desire to discover the fate of their loved ones, and culminating in compounded social, economic, and psychological suffering—particularly in the case of families whose male members have all been arrested and forcibly disappeared, as a form of collective punishment practised by the Egyptian authorities.



Brief Background:

In what context were thousands cast into the abyss?

Following the outbreak of the 25 January 2011 Revolution, the security situation in Sinai deteriorated, escalating further on 5 August 2012 when armed assailants attacked a military checkpoint in Rafah, resulting in the killing of 16 army personnel. No group claimed responsibility for the attack. This incident marked a turning point in the official approach, leading to dismissals from senior positions, including the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the Minister of Defence, the Director of the General Intelligence Service, and the Governor of North Sinai. It was also followed by the launch of “Operation Eagle 2,” signalling the militarisation of the region, accompanied by a pledge from former President Mohamed Morsi to reassert control over it.¹²

Following the ousting of Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, armed attacks escalated, and the group “Ansar Beit al-Maqdis” adopted a takfiri rhetoric against the army and police. The group expanded its operations to Cairo and other governorates, including an assassination attempt on the Minister of Interior in September 2013. It later targeted security installations and tourists, with one of its most prominent attacks being the bombing of the Karm al-Qawadis checkpoint in Sinai in October 2014, which killed more than 26 army personnel and marked a new escalation in the conflict.¹³

On 26 October 2014, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi issued Decree No. 367 of 2014 imposing a state of emergency and curfew in North Sinai—measures that effectively remained in place until mid-2021.¹⁴ This was followed by the establishment of a 5-kilometre-wide security buffer zone along the Gaza border, leading to the complete evacuation of the Egyptian city of Rafah and the forcible displacement of approximately 150,000 local residents from Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid, and surrounding villages.¹⁵

In November 2014, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis announced its allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) and changed its name to Wilayat Sinai (Sinai Province)¹⁶. In early 2015, following a series of attacks

¹² Egypt President Mursi sacks officials after Sinai attacks, BBC, 08 August 2012 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19184637>

¹³ Egypt: 29 killed as Sinai attacks target security forces, BBC, 24 October 2014 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-29763144>

¹⁴ Imposition of a curfew and declaration of a state of emergency in North Sinai for three months, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 24 October 2014 <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/554391>

¹⁵ Egypt clings to the buffer zone and the elimination of tunnels in Rafah, Al Jazeera, 30 October 2014 <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2014/10/30/%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%82%D8%AF-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%8A>

¹⁶ Live: Israel strikes Iran with 'unprecedented force', Trump 'still interested' in diplomacy, France 24, 10 November 2014 <https://www.france24.com/en/>



on army forces in Al-Arish, the Egyptian state established the "Unified Command of the Area East of the Canal" as part of a strategic shift in the management of military operations. However, the conflict showed no signs of abating. Clashes remained concentrated in Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Arish, and Rafah, with some areas effectively turning into open battlefields subjected to aerial and artillery bombardment, resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties.¹⁷

In 2017, two pivotal incidents took place in Sinai. The first occurred on 24 November, when gunmen—believed to be affiliated with ISIS—attacked Al-Rawda Mosque in Bir al-Abd, killing more than 300 civilians, including 27 children, and injuring dozens during Friday prayers, in what became the deadliest terrorist attack in Egypt's modern history.¹⁸ The second took place on 19 December, when Wilayat Sinai targeted a military helicopter at Al-Arish Airport with an anti-tank missile during a visit by the Ministers of Defence and Interior, marking yet another turning point in the state's approach to the security situation.

In the aftermath, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced the establishment of a 5-kilometre-wide buffer zone around Al-Arish Airport and issued directives to secure Sinai within three months using what he termed "brute force," which was followed by the launch of the comprehensive military campaign Sinai 2018.¹⁹

Since mid-2019, militant operations expanded into Bir al-Abd, a town that had previously been less affected by the conflict. The escalation peaked on 21 July 2020, with an attack on an army camp in the village of Rabaa, followed by the temporary control of several villages southwest of the town by the Wilayat Sinai group, which led to the displacement of local residents. Approximately 70 days later, the group withdrew, and civilians were allowed to return under army supervision. However, the area had not been fully cleared of improvised explosive devices, resulting in the deaths of 16 civilians and injuries to 18 others between July and November 2020.²⁰

Military operations have led to significant civilian casualties, some of which have been officially acknowledged by the state. In February 2021, the fact-finding committee of the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) published a report following its visit to the governorate, in which it stated that the number of civilian deaths had reached 1,836, with 2,915 injured—though the report did not attribute responsibility to any specific party. It also noted that compensation and medical

¹⁷ Egypt changes the strategy of the war against terrorism in Sinai, Elaf, 01 February 2015

<https://elaph.com/Web/News/2015/2/979315.html>

¹⁸ 3 years after the Al-Rawda massacre: was the crime file closed?, The New Arab, 26 November 2020

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/3-%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%BA%D9%84%D9%82-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A9%D8%9F>

¹⁹ "Sinai State" adopts an attack on Al-Arish airport in North Sinai during a visit by the Ministers of Defense and Interior, BBC News Arabic, 19 December 2017 <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-42417772>

²⁰ "Bir al-Abd" villages: ISIS packers and the negligence of the Egyptian authorities cause new civilian casualties, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, 24 October 2020 <https://sinaifhr.org/show/27>



care had been provided to victims. A separate report issued by the Governor of North Sinai revealed that a total of approximately EGP 3.5 billion had been spent on aid and compensation between 2015 and May 2020.²¹

The repeated military campaigns, the ongoing state of emergency, and the daily curfew from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. in certain areas have turned daily life in Sinai into a continuous ordeal. The night-time curfew has impeded residents' access to hospitals, as ambulance movements are prohibited during those hours. In addition, strict restrictions have been imposed on essential activities such as fishing, agriculture, and trade. These measures have also included the prohibition of the entry of construction materials, car spare parts, electrical and agricultural supplies, fuel, and even foodstuffs, which have been subjected to a quota system under the pretext of counterterrorism efforts. These policies have further deepened the historical marginalisation experienced by the residents of Sinai.²²

Since the escalation of the conflict at the end of 2013, the army has relied on irregular local militias, known as manadeeb (delegates), to compensate for its lack of intelligence in the region. Some local residents were recruited to provide intelligence and carry out security tasks, often wearing a mixture of civilian and military attire. Owing to their lack of accountability to the law or any formal codes of conduct, some of these individuals became involved in serious human rights violations, exploiting their positions of authority for personal gain or to settle private disputes.²³

During the years of armed conflict, government forces deprived large segments of the population of fundamental rights, including the rights to education and healthcare. For example, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights documented systematic violations against civilians, including the destruction of 73 schools and the use of 49 others for military purposes such as inspection, supply operations, and surveillance—sometimes while students were present, thereby putting their lives at risk. Youth centres, such as Al-Saha Centre in Rafah and Al-Zuhur Centre in Sheikh Zuwaid, were also used as military bases and sites for unlawful detention. From 2012 up to the time of the report's publication, thousands of civilians were subjected to torture and enforced disappearance in these facilities, which had previously been spaces for sport and recreation.²⁴

Government forces and affiliated militias were also implicated in the recruitment of children. The Egyptian army recruited minors, including children under the age of 12, in what likely constitutes a war crime. These children were assigned dangerous tasks such as transporting supplies or

²¹ Wael Ali <<Al-Masry Al-Youm>> publishes the report of <<National Council for Human Rights>> on North Sinai, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 10 February 2021 <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2253991>

²² North Sinai: More than 2190 days under the absurd roaming ban, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, 24 October 2020 <https://sinaifhr.org/show/26>

²³ For further information on the subject, refer to the Human Rights Watch report: "If You Are Afraid for Your Lives, Leave Sinai! Egyptian Security Forces and ISIS-Affiliate Abuses in North Sinai" <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/28/if-you-are-afraid-your-lives-leave-sinai/egyptian-security-forces-and-isis>

²⁴ Mines Of the Future, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, 08 April 2024 <https://sinaifhr.org/show/365>



monitoring suspected individuals, during which they were often pursued and killed by members of the Sinai Province militant group. This recruitment also included children aged between 15 and 18, who were assigned direct combat roles.²⁵

Fixed military and security checkpoints became widespread along main roads, severely restricting daily movement and turning into sites of systematic violations. These included arbitrary stops and detentions based on tribal or geographical affiliation, particularly targeting members of the Sawarka and Rumaylat tribes, as well as residents of Rafah and Sheikh Zuwaid, often without judicial warrants.²⁶

Starting in 2020, the Egyptian authorities also entered into obscure amnesty deals with individuals suspected of belonging to the Islamic State (ISIS) affiliate in North Sinai, without disclosing the criteria on which these arrangements were based. Available evidence and public statements by officials suggest that the authorities granted pardons to certain members of Wilayat Sinai, the ISIS affiliate in North Sinai, in exchange for surrendering their weapons and turning themselves in. However, the authorities have not clarified whether they have any plans to prosecute those suspected of involvement in serious crimes, including the mass killing of civilians and extrajudicial executions.²⁷

In mid-2021, Military Intelligence began implementing a policy of integrating and arming members of the Sawarka, Tarabin, and Al-Rumaylat tribes, financed by local businessmen and supported by military training in Arish and Bir al-Abd, as part of what was termed the "Cleansing Battle." In return, displaced residents were permitted to return to villages located outside the designated buffer zone. This policy contributed to the restoration of control over areas previously held by the group, albeit with casualties and injuries among the local tribal fighters.²⁸

On 25 October 2021, President al-Sisi announced the lifting of the nationwide state of emergency. However, prior to that announcement, on 2 October 2021, Republican Decree No. 442 of 2021 had been issued, effectively circumventing the official termination by reimposing the emergency framework in North Sinai, albeit in a broader and more expansive form than previous decrees. The decree granted exceptional powers to the Minister of Defence, effectively empowering the military forces on the ground to take actions affecting citizens' fundamental rights. These powers included the authority to impose curfews at any time, forcibly evacuate civilians from designated areas,

²⁵ I Was Afraid...I Was Only 17, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, 08 August 2023 <https://sinaifhr.org/show/205>

²⁶ For further information on the subject, refer to the Human Rights Watch report: "If You Are Afraid for Your Lives, Leave Sinai! Egyptian Security Forces and ISIS-Affiliate Abuses in North Sinai" <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/28/if-you-are-afraid-your-lives-leave-sinai/egyptian-security-forces-and-isis>

²⁷ Questionable Amnesty Deals for ISIS Members, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, 13 March 2024 <https://sinaifhr.org/show/353>

²⁸ Meet the newly remade Union of Sinai Tribes, the force taking over the fight in Sinai, Mada Masr, 24 May 2022 <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2022/05/24/feature/politics/meet-the-newly-remade-union-of-sinai-tribes-the-force-taking-over-the-fight-in-sinai/>



seize private and public property for "security" reasons, restrict or prohibit the use of communication and transportation, and expand search and raid operations without effective judicial oversight.²⁹

It is therefore evident that Decree No. 442 was issued pre-emptively to strip the announcement of the state of emergency's termination of any substantive meaning. It enabled military authorities to continue effectively operating under emergency conditions in Sinai, but outside declared constitutional and oversight frameworks, thereby reinforcing a climate of impunity and entrenching a state of permanent exception.

Despite President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's declaration in 2023 of the end of the war on terror, monitoring and interviews conducted by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights in the years following that announcement indicate that arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances of civilians have continued up to the time of the report's publication.

²⁹ Dangerous presidential decree "perpetuates" the state of emergency in North Sinai, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, 06 October 2021 <https://sinaifhr.org/show/103>



Domestic and International legal obligations

Egyptian national law does not include the term “enforced disappearance”, nor has Egypt ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Nevertheless, the act itself involves a number of violations that are criminalised under Egyptian law, such as arbitrary arrest and detention incommunicado, both of which are prohibited under Article 139 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Furthermore, detention in unofficial places constitutes a clear violation of Article 41 of the same law. In addition, torture is criminalised under Article 126 of the Penal Code, which states:

“Any civil servant or public employee who ordered or committed torture to force an accused to make confession shall be imprisoned from three to ten years. In case of death of the victim, he will face the same sentence stated for premeditated murder.”

Accordingly, these legal provisions ought, in principle, to constitute effective legal protections against the commission of enforced disappearance, notwithstanding the absence of a specific definition of the offence in domestic legislation, or at the very least provide a mechanism for accountability and prevention. However, the reality in Egypt points in the opposite direction. Impunity prevails, and the authorities deny the very existence of the crime, leading to its expansion and its transformation into an almost routine practice by security agencies.

One of the mechanisms commonly employed involves recording the arrest in official reports as having taken place on the day before the detainee is presented to the Public Prosecution. This creates the false impression that the arrest was conducted in accordance with the law, thereby concealing the fact of enforced disappearance. This mechanism is used to circumvent Article 54 of the Egyptian Constitution and Article 36 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, both of which require that a detainee be brought before the Public Prosecution within 24 hours of arrest.

More significantly, these practices were subsequently codified in law, particularly following the enactment of Anti-Terrorism Law No. 94 of 2015. Article 40 of this law granted the Public Prosecution or the competent investigative authority the right to detain a suspect for seven days, renewable once. This provision was later amended by Law No. 11 of 2017, extending the maximum detention period to 14 days, also renewable once, making a total of 28 days.

Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that: “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.” Similarly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirms that: “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.”



Chapter One: The Journey of the Forcibly Disappeared

“Beyond the Absence”

The army or police forces arrest individuals from the streets, their homes, workplaces, or at security checkpoints, thereby initiating the ordeal of enforced disappearance. This journey often involves detention in unofficial places of custody, where victims may be subjected to torture before some eventually reappear as defendants in criminal cases or are declared dead, while others remain disappeared, as if they never existed at all.

Members of Parliament representing North Sinai have criticised the conduct of the security forces and have intervened on multiple occasions to secure the release of detainees. They submitted lists of forcibly disappeared persons to the military, calling for a “review” of their cases and the release of those against whom no evidence of wrongdoing existed. On rare occasions, these efforts resulted in the release of some individuals who had been held incommunicado. For example, on 25 March 2021, Salem Abu Marahil, a Member of Parliament representing Rafah, stated on his official Facebook page that he had intervened to secure the release of more than 15 men and women from Sinai who were detained by security forces in North Sinai and Ismailia governorates.³⁰

Section 1: Circumstances of Arrest and Disappearance

Every Citizen is a Suspect

According to interviews conducted by Sinai Foundation for Human Rights with local residents from North Sinai, the mass arrests and enforced disappearances in the region were closely linked to checkpoints and arbitrary arrest campaigns. These escalated in parallel with intensified attacks by Wilayat Sinai in areas including Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid, and Arish in eastern Sinai, as well as parts of central Sinai. Gradually, these operations expanded westward to Bir al-Abd and, later, between 2019 and 2022, extended to the area of Gelbana, which administratively belongs to Ismailia Governorate and is situated at the far western edge of the Sinai Peninsula.³¹

In this context, local residents of the Sinai Peninsula have become accustomed, when travelling, to undergoing extensive questioning and thorough searches at the numerous checkpoints, as well as detention for the purpose of cross-checking their names against security wanted lists. Such detention often lasts for many hours, sometimes reaching eight, before their fate is determined, whether to be allowed to proceed or be taken into custody.

³⁰ The official Facebook page of Member of Parliament Salem Abu Maraheel, date of visit 10 July 2021
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=118711570239160&id=100262955417355

³¹ An interview with an activist from North Sinai, May 2025, Cairo, Egypt



This pattern has become particularly pronounced at checkpoints along the international road between Rafah and Qantara, as well as at checkpoints situated at Suez Canal crossings leading toward the Nile Delta governorates.

The treatment tends to be notably worse for local residents belonging to the Sawarka and Rumaylat tribes, or those residing in Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid.

Sinai Foundation for Human Rights interviewed Fares, one of the civilians who was arbitrarily detained in the second half of 2020 in the city of al-Qantara, Ismailia governorate, while he was on his way home to al-Arish.³² He told us:

“I was on my way home from Cairo to Al Arish, and when I reached El-Qantara to take the passenger ferry to cross the Suez Canal, I first had to pass through a checkpoint with joint forces from the army, police, and the National Security Agency. When I gave them my ID card, one of the National Security officers immediately stopped me when he saw that my residence is Sheikh Zuweid. Of course, that happens every day with any person traveling and their ID card lists their residence as Sheikh Zuweid or Rafah.

At least hours later, after a long wait at the checkpoint, they transferred me to the National Security branch in Ismailia inside the Educational Complex building, which is unofficial and no one knows anything about it except staff or prisoners. During my interrogation at the checkpoint in El-Qantara, I was assaulted because of my residence and after I pointed out the illegality of their actions, I was met with physical assault and verbal abuse.

No one told me anything about where I was going. I was transferred to the National Security Agency branch in Ismailia blindfolded, and upon arrival, they placed me in solitary confinement, which was about 1.5 metres wide and 2 metres long with five metal rings fixed to the wall. They put me on the floor and handcuffed my left hand to one of those metal rings, and my eyes were kept blindfolded until morning. Following this, they took me to an office to interrogate me and started asking: “Do you pray? Do you listen to any of the well-known sheikhs or religious figures? Do you read religious books? Do you visit Jihadist websites?” I consistently answered ‘no’. The officer changed the line of questioning and started asking me: “Did you participate in the elections? Who did you vote for? And why did you not vote for so and so?” and so on about the elections. They kept going, “Do you like President Sisi? Did you vote for him?”, I said “No, I don’t like him and I did not vote for him

³² Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. A pseudonym has been used at the request of the interviewee. October 2020, North Sinai, Egypt



because he is responsible for the economic decline”. They then asked if I broke the law in any way, and I said ‘No’. The interrogator lost his temper, hurled insults at me, and said: “Is your answer always no? You’re a liar, and you will not leave this place alive”. He hit me really hard with both of his hands in my chest before they took me back to solitary confinement. I was held there for five days before being released. Upon my release, I required two months of treatment for chest muscle tears inflicted by the officer’s assault”

According to testimonies from several relatives of the disappeared, arrests are sometimes carried out arbitrarily in the streets through what resemble mobile checkpoints that are suddenly set up to search passersby, check their identification, and detain some of them for questioning at police or military facilities. Some of those detained are released after varying periods of interrogation, while the fate of others remains unknown. This was the case recounted to us by an eyewitness to the disappearance of Hossam Saleh Suleiman Al-Sawarka³³, 30 years old:

“Hossam resides in North Sinai Governorate in Bir al-Abd in a village called Masfak. We were travelling together to Ismailia on 19 June 2019. At the Suez Canal ferry crossing they were obviously there collecting ID cards to see the names on the computer, returning the cards back and letting people pass through. After collecting the cards, they yelled asking for Hossam, and Hossam spoke up and said here I am. They asked him to follow them, and he was taken by individuals in military uniform into a car with ‘Suez Canal Waterway Security’ written on it. Since then his family has asked everywhere for him but they got no information on his whereabouts. Someone advised them to send a telegram to the Public Prosecutor, and so I went with his father to send it by mail, but the post office employee refused to take it and told us we were getting ourselves in trouble.

Hossam’s father works as a primary school principal in Masfak village, and was one of the people who cooperated with the Secret Service Office of Military Intelligence to eliminate terrorism. Hossam’s father asked an officer in the Secret Service Office to find out the whereabouts of his son for him, and said that all he wanted was to just find out where he was. The officer told him Hossam was not with the Intelligence Agency or with the army in Sinai, and that he might possibly be with the National Security Agency or at Al-Galaa Prison in Ismailia. His father has asked people who got out of Al-Galaa prison over the past five years but nothing came of it.”

³³ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The witness’s name has been withheld at their request. October 2020, North Sinai, Egypt



Hossam has been missing for about five years and we know nothing about him since his disappearance. His family has contacted anyone who might have possibly met him in prison after their release, but it's as if he never existed. No one had seen him, heard his name or come across him in nearly all detention facilities we know of or have heard of."

A recurring pattern of enforced disappearance in North Sinai involves civilians vanishing after being subjected to arbitrary stops and arrests at fixed military and security checkpoints across the region. Since the onset of the armed conflict, a near-systematic policy has prevailed whereby individuals whose national identification cards indicate a place of residence in Sheikh Zuweid or Rafah are routinely stopped, regardless of gender, a practice commonly referred to as "identity-based detention." These arrests have frequently occurred at ferry crossings east of the Suez Canal or on roads connecting cities across North Sinai, where civilians are stopped for extended periods for so-called "time verification" before their fate is determined. In some cases, individuals were arbitrarily detained due to the similarity of their names with those on security wanted lists.

According to testimonies from Sinai residents, the practice was not limited to fixed checkpoints. The scope of suspicion expanded significantly, with increased stop-and-search activity inside towns and villages, particularly targeting young men in their early twenties, individuals with ID cards from Rafah or Sheikh Zuwayed, and Palestinians during the years of armed conflict. It became common to witness two armoured vehicles patrolling aimlessly, with their personnel arresting civilians indiscriminately and without clear cause, a practice so widespread that locals dubbed it the "youth sweeper." However, this term quickly lost its accuracy, as the arrests expanded to include individuals of all age groups.³⁴

According to testimonies from residents of North Sinai, the military carried out the majority of arbitrary arrests, adopting a broader and more expansive suspicion policy than that pursued by the National Security Sector of the Ministry of Interior. The foundation also documented several cases in which arrests were conducted by local militias loyal to the army. These operations were frequently marked by retaliatory motives and carried out without legal basis or clear evidence, particularly in the aftermath of armed attacks by ISIS-affiliated groups targeting government forces.³⁵

Arbitrary arrests were often executed indiscriminately and without thorough investigation. Based on 11 interviews conducted by the foundation, arrests were documented in which individuals were detained solely due to familial ties to persons suspected of links with armed Islamist groups.

³⁴ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The witness's name has been withheld at their request. July 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

³⁵ Firsthand testimonies from residents of North Sinai, May 2025, North Sinai, Egypt



Recurrent cases of arbitrary arrest were also recorded in the city of al-Arish, targeting individuals suspected of affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood.

As part of a recurring pattern documented by Sinai Foundation for Human Rights in multiple testimonies, women have been subjected to arrest and enforced disappearance solely due to their familial ties to individuals wanted by security agencies. One such testimony details the arrest of a woman on 27 February 2018, based on suspicions that her son had joined ISIS. No formal charges were brought against her, and she was denied all legal safeguards during her 15-day detention, which involved degrading treatment and severe psychological abuse at the Arish First Police Station³⁶:

“On 27 February 2018, State security came and took me to Arish First Police Station. They were gathering all women who were related to individuals wanted by the Security Forces, so they took me and insisted I bring my phone with me for them to see if I had my son Yousef’s telephone number saved. They came to our home and my little daughter kept crying to them and they told her they would bring me back in a couple of hours, but I was there for 15 days, and I was not alone. They had taken so many women whose husbands or sons were wanted. I was in a room with a lot of people who I knew, we were about 30 women in Arish First Police station.”

The sister of **Walaa**, who herself survived nearly a year of enforced disappearance, said:³⁷

“During the period of her disappearance, the questions revolved around her husband who has been arrested since 2004 in the Taba bombings case.³⁸ I told them at the time that he hadn’t received a sentence yet, as the previous one issued against him had been overturned, and that he had been held in custody for the past ten years or so and that she knew nothing about the case”

The pattern of arresting civilians from their homes emerged in the early stages of the armed conflict, often based on denunciations or vague grounds for suspicion, particularly targeting former activists with Islamic backgrounds. With the launch of the wide-scale military campaign “Sinai 2018,” the authorities expanded this suspicion-based approach. Army and police forces intensified their security raids by employing a tactic involving the encirclement of entire residential

³⁶ Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The witness’s name has been withheld upon request. March 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

³⁷ Phone interview with a relative of one of the survivors of enforced disappearance; the witness’s details have been withheld upon request. June 2021, Cairo, Egypt

³⁸ The Taba bombings, which took place in October 2004, were a series of terrorist attacks that targeted the cities of Taba and Nuweibaa in South Sinai, specifically the Hilton Taba Hotel and the Moon Island and Baddiyah camps in Ras Shaitan. These attacks resulted in the deaths of 31 people and injured over 150 others.



neighbourhoods, blocking all entry and exit points for several days, until all homes were searched and residents' identities verified.

According to testimonies obtained by the organisation, security personnel from three different agencies visited the same homes over three consecutive days, confiscating mobile phones and computers for security inspection, and arresting dozens of men for interrogation at security premises. According to testimonies obtained by the organisation, security personnel from three different agencies visited the same homes over three consecutive days, confiscating mobile phones and computers for security inspection, and arresting dozens of men for interrogation at security premises. This tactic was repeatedly employed across most neighbourhoods in the city of al-Arish, some of which were subjected to raids more than once, without the presentation of judicial search warrants that would legally justify such actions.

A relative of Ibrahim **Salem Ibrahim Hasan Samiri**, 24 years old, described the details of his arrest from his home on 29 December 2014:³⁹

“Ibrahim had been sitting in his room after coming home from work and having dinner as usual, when suddenly, a large number of armoured vehicles arrived. Before entering our home, they spread out and surrounded the house and it was after that they took Ibrahim. The forces were from the Third Police Station, led by an officer named El-Suheili. My mother asked El-Suheili about where they were taking him, and they said they would just have a word and bring him back home. Ibrahim was about to jump out of the balcony from the fright, and so the man outside said if Ibrahim doesn't come out for them they would take Mohamed, his brother. When Ibrahim heard that, he went back as Mohamed really is a harmless, poor guy.

The next morning came and as soon as we woke up, we contacted everyone we knew, asking them to help us look into it, but we couldn't find out anything. A year and a half had passed with no updates. We were having dinner as usual when the phone rang, and it turned out to be Ibrahim calling. That was the first time we felt reassured or learned anything about him. When he said it's me, Ibrahim, words can't express how shattered we were, particularly my mother, she was inconsolable. That first phone call was unbearably hard, more than you can imagine. He said, "I'm alright, I'm fine. I'm being held in Al-Azouly Prison in Ismailia. I'm fine, don't worry about me."

³⁹ Phone interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance; the witness's name has been withheld upon request. September 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



From that moment on, he completely disappeared again. There isn't a single sentence we say that doesn't include Ibrahim's name. Not a single occasion passes without us mentioning him. His mother, for example, if she changes a curtain or a rug, the first thing she says is, 'So that when Ibrahim comes out safely, everything will look nice for him.' Anyone who greets me says, 'Hopefully we'll soon be greeting Ibrahim too.' When someone in the family passes an exam, the one giving congratulations always mentions Ibrahim. Ibrahim is the joy everyone around us wishes for us to have. We haven't adjusted to life without him, not after eleven years. Adjust? How? Sometimes I buy something and think, 'That's nice, I'll keep it and wear it when Ibrahim gets out.' How are we supposed to adapt? It's impossible. Everything we do feels incomplete. Ibrahim is the eldest among us. He's been our father figure since our father passed away."

As part of the random raid campaigns that have expanded across North Sinai, carried out by security forces with no regard for legal or humanitarian safeguards, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights documented the testimony of a former detainee who was 18 years old at the time of his arrest. He and his father were apprehended while at their farm in the Bir al-Abd countryside, during a police raid on 29 March 2018, without a judicial warrant. From the moment of their arrest, they were subjected to intense intimidation and degrading treatment, as he recounts in the following testimony:⁴⁰

"We were on the farm building a small hut to sit in for when we went to the farm, when suddenly we found the whole place was surrounded and a man in civilian attire entered, armed with a pistol, and held us at gunpoint. My father was standing, and the man told him: 'Don't move from where you are.' So my father replied: 'It's fine, I'm just standing. Where would I even go?' There were other farms in the area but only ours was surrounded. They took us out of the hut and started searching. The officer then told me, 'Go get your father's ID from his jacket.' When I got back, they made us get down on our knees and blindfolded us. When they were done searching the farm, the officer ordered us to run in a certain direction towards the police cars with our hands behind our backs, and warned that he would shoot us if moved our hands from behind our backs. We were blindfolded, and my dad was pulling me as I ran behind him. It was a distance of about 500 metres. We reached the car and the officer told me to lie on my stomach in the car. He handcuffed our hands behind our backs and I laid down with my dad right next to me. On the way, they came across a shepherd. They picked him up and threw him over us. We stayed piled like that the whole trip until we reached Bir al-Abd police station."

⁴⁰ Personal interview with a victim of enforced disappearance; the witness's identity has been withheld upon request. August 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



Another pattern of arrest that we have documented involves the victim receiving a phone call from a security agency informing them of the intention to visit their home and escort them to a security facility for a short period of questioning. The individual is asked to remain at home while awaiting the arrival of security forces, with a promise of release after answering a few questions. However, once apprehended, the person is taken to an unofficial place of detention, thereby entering a phase of enforced disappearance that may last for an extended period, amid a complete absence of any official information regarding their fate or whereabouts. This was the case for **Lotfi Salem Mahmoud Ahmed**, 27, whose relative recounted that he had received a phone call from an officer affiliated with Battalion 101 in al-Arish, instructing him to wait at home to be taken for questioning at the battalion headquarter.⁴¹

“In April 2014, an officer who works in Battalion 101 called him and said, ‘Lotfy, the battalion commander would like to ask you a few questions. I’ll drive you back home, don’t leave the house and wait for me.’ Indeed, Lotfy waited for him until the evening when a private vehicle pulled up with an officer and three soldiers inside, in civilian clothing, and they took him. The one who came to pick him up in the car was called Hamid Abu Hmeda, they took him in front of his younger brother and wife. Last we heard of him was five years ago when someone said he was with them in Al-Galaa. We asked around everywhere for him, but no one knew where he was. We submitted a request in his name to Dr. Salah Sallam, a member of the National Council for Human Rights, around seven years ago, but we have not been able to obtain any information about him, not even whether he is still alive.”

According to the family of **Abdullah Salem Awad Abdullah**, 27, he received a phone call on 11 October 2022 from an officer at Arish Third Police Station requesting that he report to the station to answer a few questions. Shortly thereafter, he was subjected to enforced disappearance for a period of one year.⁴²

“Abdullah works as a plasterer. On 11 October 2022, An officer from the Third Arish Police Station called him while he was at work and told him to come in. He went straight there in his work clothes, fearing that if he was late, they might come to our house or something might happen. He stayed at the station for two days. I brought him clothes and food, but on the third day, when I went to bring him a meal, they told me he had been released. We didn’t know where they had taken him, and they kept saying they didn’t know his whereabouts, until Abdullah finally appeared

⁴¹ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance; the witness’s identity has been withheld upon request. October 2023, North Sinai, Egypt

⁴² Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance; the witness’s identity has been withheld upon the victim’s request. September 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



on 27 September 2023 before the Supreme State Security prosecution in Cairo in connection with Case No. 203 of 2023."

Section 2: Where Does the Abyss Lie? And Why Is All Contact with the Outside World Lost?

"For 38 months, you are completely cut off from the outside world. No one knows anything about you, not your family, not your friends, not anyone. It is as though you had once existed and then disappeared from the world. To be frank, I was not thinking of anyone, neither my family nor my children. All I could do was pray that God would somehow get me out of that place."

Testimony of a survivor of enforced disappearance/former detainee at Al-Azouly Military Prison.

This falls under the umbrella of the crime of enforced disappearance: the loss of any ability by the detainee to communicate with the outside world, particularly when held in unofficial detention facilities. Such conditions inherently sever all lines of contact with the outside world, whether with their families or their legal representatives. This occurs despite the stipulations of Article (41), which states: "No person may be imprisoned except in designated prisons, and no prison warden may admit any person without a written order signed by the competent authority, nor may they be held beyond the period specified in that order." In addition, Article 139 of the Code of Criminal Procedure⁴³ affirms that detention is permissible only in official places of detention, namely public and geographically designated prisons, reform and rehabilitation centres, or police stations.

However, in cases of enforced disappearance, the detention facilities used are, in almost all instances, unofficial locations that are not subject to judicial oversight in any form. Lawyers and family members are unable to access these places or obtain any information regarding the detainees. In many cases, any attempt to do so may place them at risk of arrest themselves.

According to interviews conducted by the Sinai Foundation with survivors of enforced disappearance or their family members, testimonies revealed that individuals were held in unofficial detention sites such as Al-Azouly Military Prison, Battalion 101, the National Security headquarters in Arish, Al-Zohour Camp in Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Saha Camp in Rafah, the National Security office in Ismailia, Al-Azouly Prison in Ismailia, Al-Galaa Military Base in Ismailia, Central Security Forces in Ismailia, Al-Zarafa Military Camp, police stations in Arish city, and the

⁴³Article (139) of the Code of Criminal Procedure: "He shall have the right to contact whomever he wishes to inform of what has occurred to him and to seek the assistance of a lawyer. He must be promptly informed of the charges brought against him."



police stations of Rummana and Bir al-Abed, among others. This list is not exhaustive and may include additional locations.

According to the testimony of **Saad, 35 years old** and a survivor of enforced disappearance, he was arrested in the winter of 2014 from his home at around 11 p.m., without being informed of the reason for his arrest or shown any legal warrant. He was merely told to dress warmly due to the cold weather and to accompany a military force. He was transported in an open vehicle to Rummana Police Station, which was under military control and served as the headquarters of the military governor. There, he was left in soaked clothes due to heavy rain and subjected to both verbal and physical abuse. The following day, he was transferred to Al-Azouly Military Prison in Ismailia, which he described as having appalling and shocking conditions. His enforced disappearance continued for five months. Saad stated in his testimony to us:⁴⁴

"I spent nearly five months and around ten days in Al-Azouly Prison and was not allowed a single visit! None of my family even knew where I was, I had "disappeared." They didn't learn anything about me until the day I was released. All news of them was cut off from me, and no word of me reached them. There was absolutely no communication between us. To my family, I was simply a missing person, they had no idea where I was. I was living through a terrible ordeal, completely in the dark about my fate throughout that period.

We were received at Al-Azouly Prison with what they call the Tashrifa (reception), something they do to anyone who enters the prison. This so-called reception was nothing but humiliation and abuse. The soldiers beat us with green leather whips. They hit us on our heads and bodies, slapped our faces... they brutalised us. I was repeatedly struck on the head. They stripped us completely naked and searched us in a degrading manner. We had already been searched at the police station, where we came from, wearing those same clothes. They took our clothes and threw each piece in a different direction, then we were made to gather them ourselves. After that, they bound our arms and blindfolded us. As we were being taken up the stairs, the soldiers mocked us, saying things like "Watch out, stairs ahead, a wall in front of you!" There was nothing in front of us, they were just mocking and taunting us while beating us with sticks as we walked. They abused us the entire time."

⁴⁴ Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. A pseudonym has been used at the victim's request. November 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



Section 3: What Is Life Like When Cast into the Abyss? Inhumane Conditions of Detention Inside Unofficial Holding Facilities

Those subjected to enforced disappearance are cast into unofficial detention sites beyond any form of judicial oversight, where they endure harsh conditions that bear no resemblance to any human or legal standard. Not a trace of clean food, nor a breath of fresh air, nor a place fit for a human being to sleep. Detainees are forced to sleep on filthy, insect-infested blankets and relieve themselves inside the same cells using primitive plastic containers, in conditions devoid of privacy and dignity. Even the most basic daily needs, such as using the toilet or taking a shower, become degrading experiences, often accompanied by beatings and humiliation. The cells are typically suffocating, windowless, and lack any form of ventilation, crammed with far more people than they can hold. Excessive heat, hunger, and overpowering stench serve as additional tools of torment. In such an environment, some detainees resort to avoiding food or water altogether to escape the need to use the toilet. Physical and psychological suffering becomes a daily reality for individuals forcibly disappeared from the world, with no legal basis or protection.

A former inmate of Al-Azouly Military Prison recounted to us the living conditions inside the facility:⁴⁵

“As soon as we entered the cell, the stench hit you in the face, the kind of smell that brings disease. There was no washing at all. I never truly bathed during the entire period I was there. Over the five months I spent inside, I managed to wash maybe six or seven times, and even then, it wasn’t proper washing, just a few seconds before they shouted at you to get out. It was merely a splash of water over the body. Sometimes they pulled me out before I could even rinse the soap off. Other times, they made us sit like animals, like livestock, and sprayed water over us from above. It was never bathing in any meaningful sense. You’d be lucky to have thirty seconds, and it was always done in a deeply degrading manner.

As for going to the toilet, we didn’t leave the cell to defecate or relieve ourselves. We had to do it inside the same cell where we slept. There was a plastic bucket, the kind used for paint, and all the prisoners used that to relieve themselves. People would defecate in full view of everyone else in the cell. Naturally, it was humiliating. Some prisoners were so psychologically affected by it that they stopped eating or only sipped a little water, just to avoid needing to use the toilet.

⁴⁵ Phone call with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The victim’s name has been withheld at their request. February 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



The communal toilet was usually available just once a day, and using it felt like a race against time. Whether on the way there or back, we were met with nothing but beatings, abuse, humiliation... hoses, batons, shouting, and insults. Sometimes they made you crawl on your stomach or lie flat on the ground. It was constant degradation, especially for the younger men, and they showed no respect for anyone. Even elderly detainees, some over seventy years old, were forced to crawl while the soldiers rode on their backs as they moved. The language was foul. They had set a group of guards on us who were completely devoid of decency, truly the behaviour of jailers. There wasn't an ounce of mercy in their hearts for anyone.

The blankets we slept on smelled absolutely foul. Anyone leaving prison would typically leave their blanket behind, and that same blanket might have been used by several others before. They were never washed or cleaned. You could clearly see insects crawling on them. It was something utterly unimaginable for any human being, psychologically unbearable. Every part of the cell was filthy and revolting to look at. The stench inside the cell was so overpowering it was almost impossible to breathe.

Even the guards themselves, when they opened the cell door, would stand back at a distance. They couldn't come near us because of the unbearable stench of rot, a smell we had grown accustomed to. They would often wear masks because of how bad it was. And if we dared to raise our voices inside the cell, we were met with verbal abuse, the foulest insults you can imagine, and treatment that was deliberately degrading.

The heat was unbearable. You could say that if it was 35°C outside, the cell felt no less than 50°C. It was blazing, like fire. We would spend the entire day wearing nothing but our underwear. Only during prayer would we put on trousers with suspenders, just enough to pray, and immediately after, we would strip again. The air inside the cell was practically non-existent. The cell itself was about 3 metres by 5 metres, with a door that had a tiny opening, maybe 15 or 20 centimetres wide and tall. There were also two small holes in the opposite wall, but a barrier outside blocked any air from entering.

It was extremely cramped for the number of people inside, around 25 of us. We slept on our sides, facing opposite directions. You could not lie on your back at all. We were squeezed in like sardines. Most of us were utterly exhausted. At night, we would sleep for half an hour, wake up, and find ourselves drenched in sweat.



There was deliberate neglect. The guards would tell us bluntly, “You get food to shove down your throats and we take you to the toilet every so often. That is it. You are entitled to nothing else.

We were taken to the toilet in groups, two cells at a time, about 25 detainees in each. That meant 50 people using the bathroom in the same 10-minute window. Each of us had less than 30 seconds, 25 seconds even, to enter and leave the toilet. You did not even have time to prepare yourself before you were forced out again!”

As is evident from the testimony of Hanaa, who was forcibly detained for four months in 2020 inside one of the police stations in Arish, women are subjected to systematic cruelty in unofficial places of detention. Her account reveals a deeply degrading human experience, marked by a complete lack of privacy, absence of hygiene, the unmet needs of infants, and a total disregard for even the most basic standards of dignity:⁴⁶

“The room measured 7 by 8 metres, and there were 26 of us female detainees. We slept on filthy military-issued blankets. The bathroom was located outside the room and was shared with male detainees and police officers. It was extremely unsanitary. The idea that anyone could watch you as you entered and exited the bathroom was an indescribable humiliation. Showering depended entirely on their whim. In the summer heat, the situation was unbearable. The stench of sweat was suffocating. We washed our clothes in the bathroom and hung them to dry inside the room. Hygiene items came from family visits; relatives would leave them at the entrance of the station. Officially, we did not exist, and our families never saw us. I reduced the amount I ate and drank to avoid needing the toilet, as they did not always allow us to use it. To this day, the memory of it fills me with deep disgust. Among us were women detained with their infants. They would send letters hidden in clothing, asking their families to bring nappies. The station provided nothing for the children. We relied entirely on supplies brought by our families. We were not allowed to leave the room except to use the bathroom. Other than that, we remained confined inside with no movement permitted.”

Another survivor of enforced disappearance told us that the conditions for using the toilet inside the detention site were degrading and inhumane, to the extent that many detainees refrained from relieving themselves for hours or even days, due to the deliberate humiliation that accompanied the process. He explained that prison authorities permitted toilet access only once per day, usually after the dawn prayer, for an extremely short duration that did not exceed a few seconds per person, regardless of their age or health condition. He added that detainees were beaten with sticks and

⁴⁶ A personal interview with a female survivor of enforced disappearance, using a pseudonym at the request of the victim. November 2020, North Sinai, Egypt



hoses while entering or exiting the toilet area, and subjected to verbal abuse using vulgar language, without any regard for dignity or age. Some elderly detainees – those over seventy years old – were forced to crawl on the ground and were kicked and beaten in the process. He described the behaviour of the guards as aggressive and entirely devoid of compassion, noting that they deliberately sought to humiliate detainees as they moved within the facility. As a result of the extreme humiliation and psychological distress associated with this basic human need, some detainees resorted to deliberately limiting their intake of food and water to avoid having to use the toilet.⁴⁷

Section 4: What Happens to Those Cast into the Abyss? Rituals of Torture and the Extraction of Confessions

“They took me to Rummana Police Station, where an officer named “Nader” interrogated me. He said, “Oh, he’s a sheikh from Al-Azhar? Take good care of him,” then started to beat me severely along with the soldiers. The pain was so intense that I wept. He pressed my face against the wall and kept hitting my back with force. Then he used electric shocks. He tortured me with electricity repeatedly until I collapsed on the floor. I pleaded with him, telling him I had undergone surgery for haemorrhoids and that the wounds had reopened, but it made no difference. After that, I was in unbearable pain. They dragged me across the floor and threw me into a cell. I continued screaming in agony from the evening call to prayer until dawn. Eventually, one of the officers brought me a painkiller injection just to silence me. The next day, the same officer returned and threatened me using profane language and said, “We can do to your wife and children what we did to you, and we will rape her in front of you.” I told him, “By God, I haven’t done anything, and I don’t even know why I’m here.” And truly, I had no idea what my alleged crime was. He replied, “That’s something we’ll find out Peshmerga later!!””

Testimony of a Survivor of Enforced Disappearance⁴⁸

Due to the concealment of individuals in unofficial detention facilities and their complete isolation from the outside world, the likelihood of their exposure to torture increases significantly in the absence of any form of accountability or oversight. Unofficial detention sites fall outside the scope of legal monitoring. Article 1747 of the Public Prosecution’s General Instructions states: “Public prosecutors or heads of primary prosecution offices, or their deputies, must inspect the public

⁴⁷ A personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The victim’s name has been withheld at their request. May 2025, North Sinai, Egypt

⁴⁸ Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The victim’s name has been withheld at their request. May 2021, North Sinai, Egypt



prisons within their jurisdiction. Heads or directors of district prosecution offices must inspect central prisons and detention sites affiliated with them at least once a month, and these inspections must be carried out without prior notice.” This regulation indicates that official oversight is limited to public and geographically designated correctional centers and police stations, excluding all other forms of detention facilities.

Article 52 of the Constitution states: “All forms of torture are a crime with no statute of limitations” Article 126 of the Penal Code also provides that: “Any public official, civil servant or public employee who orders the torture of a suspect, or commits it himself, with the intent of extracting a confession, shall be punished with hard labour or imprisonment for a term of three to ten years. If the victim dies, the punishment prescribed for premeditated murder shall be applied.” As for international law, numerous legal instruments criminalise torture, where Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Principle 6 of the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment states: “No person under any form of detention or imprisonment shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. No circumstance whatever may be invoked as a justification for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

According to testimonies from families and survivors of enforced disappearance, torture and ill-treatment are widely and systematically used during periods of disappearance. Documentation by the foundation shows that security forces regularly resort to such practices as a means of punishment or to extract information or confessions. Common methods include prolonged suspension by the limbs, threats of torturing or sexually assaulting family members, electric shocks, and sexual violence.

A survivor of enforced disappearance recounted to us the torture rituals during interrogations inside Azouli Military Prison:⁴⁹

"During interrogation, they kept asking me about people. 'Do you know [name]?' I told them I had no connection to him whatsoever, that I had only greeted him once or twice. In those interrogations, if you said you didn't know someone, the beating and torture would begin. Because of the pain and the electric shocks, I ended up saying I knew him. Then they asked, 'Did you kill so-and-so? Did you blow up such-and-such?' I told them, 'Yes, I did.' They were very pleased to hear that, and even brought me tea. Then I said, 'If you want the truth, everything I just told you is a lie. I have nothing to do with any of it.' They started cursing at me. 'You bastard,

⁴⁹ Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The victim's name has been withheld at their request. February 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



you're playing with us.' I told them, 'You've been beating and electrocuting me nonstop. What else am I supposed to do?' So the torture started all over again. More beating, more electric shocks. The pain was so intense I felt like my soul was leaving my body. In the end, I told them, 'Fine, I'll confess to whatever you want.' They brought me some papers and told me to write down the things I had done. I said Okay, and I wrote a list: 1. I blew up a tank in the Safa neighborhood. 2. I bombed the Al-Raysa checkpoint. Around 11 or 12 charges in total that could get me locked away forever. After I finished, the officer looked at it and said, 'That's some well-organised work.' But I only wrote it because every time I denied something, they beat me, hung me, electrocuted me. The only time they stopped was when I said I did it. So I confessed to anything just to save myself."

Another survivor of enforced disappearance and torture in a secret military prison in Sinai recounted his experience, in a testimony that reflects recurring patterns of systematic torture, consistent with the accounts of other victims held in similar facilities:⁵⁰

"In the beginning, they raise the level of torture to force you into quickly confessing to whatever they want. First, someone came and twisted my limbs in a way that made it feel like my bones would snap. For example, he would force my arms behind my back, twist them, then press my face and nose into the floor while asking absurd questions I had no connection to. He said, 'Aren't you the ones who say we have come to slaughter?' I told him, 'Who said that?' He was throwing out extreme accusations he knew I had nothing to do with, just to scare me into confessing to something lesser. He electrocuted me by cuffing my hands, hanging me from a door, and then amused himself with the shocks. And as an added humiliation, he kept electrocuting my genitals. He threatened me constantly during the interrogations. He said, 'I'll bring your mother and your sister here and rape them in front of you.' I didn't respond. He said, 'What, are you a cuckold? Aren't you going to speak or say anything? I just told you I'll bring your mother and your sister.' I told him, 'What am I supposed to say?' Then he asked me, 'Is Morsi coming back?' I said, 'Yes, he's coming back.' As soon as I said that, he started beating me. Then he asked, 'Do you know so-and-so?' I didn't. So he escalated the torture."

In one of the testimonies highlighting the experience of women subjected to enforced disappearance and torture, the family of **Hind Khalil Abdul Ghani, 39 years old**, recounted the

⁵⁰ Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The victim's name has been withheld at their request. April 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



details of her ordeal, including her enforced disappearance and both physical and psychological torture, which involved beatings and electric shocks applied to sensitive areas of her body.⁵¹

“Hind had been traveling from Arish to Cairo regularly to visit her husband, who had been detained in Tora Prison since 2004. She made this visit every month, but in May 2021, while at the Qantara checkpoint, she was searched and questioned. She called us an hour later and said that a National Security officer had asked her to come with him and that she’d be back within two hours. After that, her phone was switched off, and she completely disappeared.

After an entire month of searching, we found out that she had appeared before the Ismailia Prosecution and was granted release. But the release order was never implemented. She disappeared again for four more months. An officer at the station told us she had been released and that they weren’t responsible for her “escape.” Eventually, Hind appeared at the State Security Prosecution in Cairo on 3 November 2021, in connection with Case 1935 of 2021.

In her testimony to the prosecutor, Hind stated that she had been tortured. She said they beat her with a stick while she was blindfolded, and subjected her to electric shocks on sensitive areas of her body.”

The testimonies documented by the Sinai Foundation show that torture in North Sinai was not an exception, but rather a systematic practice within secret detention facilities. The witnesses' accounts reveal that the purpose of this torture was not always to extract real information, but rather to force detainees to confess to anything, whether they had done it or not, in order to close cases at any cost. The methods of torture did not distinguish between a man and a child, or between an accused person and a mere suspect; everyone was subjected to humiliation without exception, in blatant violation of all international and domestic conventions that criminalise torture and prohibit any violation of human dignity.

Another testimony obtained by the Sinai Foundation from a released detainee, who had been held with **Bahaa El-Din Fathi Mohamed, 17 years old**, reveals the scale of abuse Bahaa faced during his 101-day enforced disappearance, from 23 September 2024 to 2 January 2025. The testimony describes severe torture and systematic humiliation inflicted during his interrogation in order to force a confession:⁵²

⁵¹ A phone conversation with a relative of a survivor of enforced disappearance. The witness’s details have been withheld upon request. June 2021, Cairo, Egypt

⁵² Phone Conversation with an eyewitness and survivor of enforced disappearance. Witness’s identifying information has been withheld upon request. February 2025, North Sinai, Egypt



“What I know is that Bahaa confessed to everything, whether they wanted it or not, just from how much they tortured him when he was held by the Central Security Forces in Ismailia. It seemed like he was being interrogated every few days, and he’d come back beaten and bleeding. The first time I saw him, he looked in terrible shape. He was disheveled, barefoot, and clearly showing signs of torture. They put him in solitary confinement. When we tried to call out to him or talk to him, the guards yelled at us and said, ‘He’s just a filthy political case, no one talks to him.’”

After a while, I managed to speak to him. He told me that during interrogation at State Security, they used to tie him to a metal chair, wrap wires around his genitals, hands, and feet, and electrocute him. They also hung him, tying his hands to a high point and his feet to a lower one, not vertically though. He said his body would bend like a bow.”

Abdel Fattah, a survivor of enforced disappearance, confirms that torture was used to extract information about his relatives during his six-month disappearance, first in Rummanah Police Station and later at El-Galaa Military Camp in Ismailia. He reported that one of the officers repeatedly told him: “I won’t let you go until you tell me where your father and uncle are.” This question, he said, was at the heart of the torture he endured throughout his detention:⁵³

“I went into the interrogation, and he asked me: ‘Who in your family is in the Muslim Brotherhood?’ He was beating me and cursing at me as he asked me where my father was, I told him, ‘I left him at home.’ He kept going, ‘Then where is your uncle?’ Anyway, he kept saying, ‘No, he’s not coming straight’ and asked someone to strip me of my clothes and I stayed in my undergarments. I found him saying, ‘No, take his underwear off as well.’, and he stripped me naked like the day my mother gave birth to me. Of course, I was blindfolded and handcuffed. He had a plank of wood he would use to hit me on the back, and he was slapping me on the face. He also had an electric shock device. I would hear its sound and start trembling, and he used it to electrocute me. It got to the point where, when he shocked me, I would jerk from the pain, and one time my face hit a wall. After that, the area under my eye stayed swollen for a week. He electrocuted me in every place you can imagine, even my private parts.”

The victim also stated that during his detention, he was subjected to severe torture by two individuals, who, according to him, seemed to compete in torturing him. He recounted that on one occasion, while being electrocuted, he fell to the ground on his back, completely naked. One of

⁵³ Phone call with a survivor of enforced disappearance, using a pseudonym at their request. January 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



the torturers then placed a chair over his legs, while the other pressed down on his shoulder with his knee. His hands were tied behind his back using plastic restraints (zip ties).

He added that one of them sat on the chair that was now placed over his chest and began electrocuting him in various parts of his body, including his genitals and neck, with no exceptions. During this torture session, he was interrogated about his alleged affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, which he categorically denied, affirming that he had never joined any group before. He was also asked personal religious questions, such as whether he prayed and whether his wife wore the hijab or the niqab.

On the same day, he said a bottle of cold water was poured over him, even though the weather was extremely cold, as it was January, and the electric torture continued. He described that night as one of the harshest of his life, saying:

“That night, with all the screaming and crying, was the hardest night of my life. I was 24 years old at the time, and it was an incredibly difficult night. There was another detainee in my cell who told me that he had been crying while hearing my screams during the torture, terrified of when his own turn for interrogation would come.”

Section 5: Children cast into the abyss, a small voice in the darkness!

“I endured torture beyond anything imaginable. I was kept handcuffed behind my back for 103 days straight. From the very first night at National Security to the very last, my legs were shackled. For twenty consecutive days, I was hung up and beaten every single day while completely naked. I saw enough electricity to light up Arish for ten years. And woe to me, I came face to face with fear itself.”

Despite the extremely brutal nature of the armed conflict in North Sinai, children have not been spared from the cycle of violations, foremost among them, the crime of enforced disappearance. According to testimonies collected and documented by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, children are arbitrarily arrested by army or police forces, or both acting jointly, without presenting any judicial warrant and without notifying their families of their whereabouts. They are then held in unofficial or military facilities, deprived of contact with the outside world, denied access to a judge, and prevented from obtaining legal representation. In some cases, the periods of disappearance extended for weeks or even months, posing a direct threat to the children's physical and psychological well-being.

The enforced disappearance of children represents one of the most serious forms of violations committed against minors, as it strips the child of the legal protections guaranteed by national laws



and international treaties, most notably, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Bahaa El-Din Fathi Mohamed, 17 years old

The foundation's team met with a member of the child Bahaa's family, as well as a released detainee who had been held with Bahaa during his enforced disappearance at the Security Forces camp in Ismailia. The former detainee recounted shocking details about Bahaa's arrest and his 101-day disappearance, during which he was subjected to severe torture despite being a minor. His testimony reveals a series of grave violations that began with his detention without legal basis, followed by enforced disappearance and torture, and extended to the denial of his rights to a fair trial and the legal protections afforded to minors.⁵⁴



A relative of Bahaa said:

"On September 23, 2024, Bahaa was at home when his friend Ahmed called him, saying he had been kicked out of his house and asked Bahaa to come pick him up near the cemetery in the Abu Saqal neighborhood. As soon as Bahaa stepped onto the main street, three men got out of a Hyundai Verna and arrested him. When he arrived at the National Security headquarters in Arish, he found that his friend Ahmed had also been arrested and was being held there. Bahaa spent 52 days in National Security custody.

For the first 15 days, he was subjected to extremely severe torture. They stripped him completely naked and electrocuted him. They hung him from the door, sometimes tied him to a bed in a crucifixion position, drenched him with water, and poured water into his nose and mouth while suffocating him to the brink of death. They used intense electric shocks on him.

In the following days, the torture lessened but continued, mostly through beatings and interrogation. He was held in solitary confinement at the Security Forces camp in Ismailia. Then suddenly, on 1 April 2025, we learned that he had appeared before

⁵⁴ A personal interview with a relative of one of the children who survived enforced disappearance and remains in pretrial detention. The witness's identity has been withheld upon their request. February 2025, North Sinai, Egypt



the Supreme State Security Prosecution in Cairo. He told the prosecution everything that had happened to him, but the prosecutor refused to include his testimony in the official record and told him: ‘Sign what's written — if you don’t, I’ll send you back to National Security and ask them to increase the torture.’

According to the testimony of one of the detainees who was held with him during the period of enforced disappearance at the Security Forces Camp in Ismailia:⁵⁵

“What I know is that Bahaa confessed to everything, whether they wanted it or not, just from how much they tortured him when he was held by the Central Security Forces in Ismailia. It seemed like he was being interrogated every few days, and he’d come back beaten and bleeding. The first time I saw him, he looked in terrible shape. He was disheveled, barefoot, and clearly showing signs of torture. They put him in solitary confinement. When we tried to call out to him or talk to him, the guards yelled at us and said, ‘He’s just a filthy political case, no one talks to him.’

After a while, I managed to speak to him. He told me that during interrogation at State Security, they used to tie him to a metal chair, wrap wires around his genitals, hands, and feet, and electrocute him. They also hung him, tying his hands to a high point and his feet to a lower one, not vertically though. He said his body would bend like a bow.”

Subsequently, Bahaa was listed as a defendant in Case No. 2 of 2025 before the Supreme State Security Prosecution. Despite being a minor, he was neither placed in a juvenile care facility nor referred to a child court, as required by law. Instead, he was subjected to serious violations, including being denied family visits and tried on terrorism-related charges. His lawyer was also denied the right to communicate with him, as his pretrial detention has been repeatedly renewed remotely via video conference, without transferring him from his place of detention or allowing him to meet with anyone.

Hasan, 14 years old

Hasan’s sister recounted shocking details about the raid on their home and the arrest of her 14-year-old brother, who was subjected to enforced disappearance for 40 days before being released by army forces. Her account reveals how the ordeal began from the moment he was taken, followed

⁵⁵ Phone conversation with a survivor and eyewitness of enforced disappearance. The witness’s identity has been withheld upon their request. February 2025, North Sinai, Egypt



by severe beatings, death threats, and serious violations inside Bir al-Abd police station, all while the authorities completely denied his presence throughout the entire period of detention.⁵⁶

“In February 2015, we were shocked by a raid that came to arrest my younger brother at home. Around 10 people came, 8 soldiers and 2 officers. They looked like the army from their uniforms. They stormed into the house and asked for my brother. He was sleeping in his room. Eight soldiers went in and told him, ‘Come talk to the officer outside, he wants you.’ Then they took him with them to Bir al-Abd police station. At that time, the army was stationed inside the station along with the police.

As soon as he arrived at the station, they told him, ‘Mohamed Bey wants to talk to you.’ Then they took him into the station’s corridor for what’s called a Tashrifa (reception). They make you stand against the wall, search you, and then take you in front of a line of soldiers who beat you up until you reach the cell door. After the beating, they threw him into a cell. There were 75 others inside with him.

He stayed in the cell for six days without any interrogation or anything at all. Then came the first interrogation. Of course, they blindfolded him, tied his hands, and took him in to see the officer. That was the first time he was brought before the officer and the first time he was interrogated. They asked him, “Why are you causing trouble?” But he didn’t even understand what problem they were accusing him of. He kept asking, “What’s the issue?” Most of the questions were about the Muslim Brotherhood in the village. They’d ask, “Where’s so-and-so?” and he’d respond, “How should I know where he is?” Every time he said, “I don’t know,” they’d beat him.

In one of the beatings, they kicked him in the chest with a shoe while he was still blindfolded, and he passed out. They took him to Bir al-Abd hospital, and when he regained consciousness, he found they had hooked him up to an IV drip. A soldier was assigned to stay with him there. When his condition improved, they brought him back to the station.

He returned to the cell and stayed there for two more days. Then they brought him in for a second interrogation, again, blindfolded, and it was the same thing: they kept asking him about people, and he got beaten again because he couldn’t answer their questions. The officer threatened him and said, “You’re worth a bullet, I’ll shoot you and throw you out the window.”

⁵⁶ Personal interview with the sister of a child who survived enforced disappearance. The victim’s name has been withheld at the family’s request. December 2020, North Sinai, Egypt



During the periods when there were no interrogations, soldiers would come down and beat them in the cell. They were dressed in civilian clothes and would enter and make everyone stand facing the wall. Then they'd pick whoever they wanted and beat them all day. This happened three or four times over the 40 days. During that whole time, we knew nothing about him. When we asked, they just told us, "He's not here."

On the day my brother was released, one of the sergeants who was there told the inmates in the cell, "If you don't go home today, you won't be going anywhere until the officer comes back from Hajj." After that, the sergeant took them up to the officer, and they were lined up in a row in front of him. The officer walked along the line, looking at each one of them. There was one prisoner who had a beard, and the officer told him, "You're going to National Security." Then he stopped at my brother and said, "You're not going anywhere, step aside." He made him stand to the side until he finished checking the rest of the line and let them all out. Then the officer came back to my brother and asked, "Are you going to cause trouble in the streets again? Act like a thug again?" My brother said, "No." So the officer replied, "Then you can go." That officer sat down and gave him a lecture, saying, "You're our sons, and the country needs you." This was a different officer from the one who had interrogated my brother before, the treatment was completely different. He then asked him, "Do you have anything in safekeeping? Do you have a national ID?" My brother said, "I haven't gotten an ID yet." The officer told him, "Alright, go downstairs, collect your things, and go home. But don't walk on the main street, if we come out and find you, we'll take you again."

Sherif Mahmoud Saeed Mahmoud, a student at the Faculty of Engineering, 17 years old

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights met with a relative of Sherif, who recounted the details of his experience of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance, beginning with the raid on his home in October 2014 by a joint security force of the military and police, followed by prolonged detention without legal basis in Azouli Prison, then his transfer between multiple detention facilities, and ultimately his re-disappearance





after completing his prison sentence in July 2019. Since then, his family has not received any official information regarding his fate to this day:⁵⁷

“A joint force of police and military vehicles arrived at 2:30 a.m., stormed the house, and conducted a search. They said they were looking for Sherif. His father refused to let Sherif go with them alone and insisted, “Take me with him.” They confiscated Sherif’s computer and phone, as well as his father’s phone.

When they got downstairs to the vehicles, they took Sherif and left his father behind. The force was a large group from National Security, the military, and police. After that, Sherif disappeared, we had no information about him. Later, we found out that he had been held in Azouli Prison for a year and seven months, up until January 2016. Then, he called his family from Mostaqbal Police Station in Ismailia and told them he was being transferred to Tora Prison. After that, the family was able to visit him normally. He was detained in connection with Case No. 502 (Military Prosecution) of 2016, registered as Case No. 184 of 2017. He was accused of joining a terrorist organisation and was sentenced to three years in prison on 12 June 2019. He completed his sentence in July 2019. After finishing the sentence, he was transferred to Khalifa Temporary Holding Facility, then to Mostaqbal Police Station in Ismailia, and from there to National Security in Arish on 28 July 2019. Since that date, we have not received any information about his whereabouts to this day.

Sherif was a first-year engineering student, his future was lost, and his life was shattered. His father sent telegrams to the Presidency and the Prime Minister’s Office, but nothing came of it. He also submitted requests to local MPs, but still, nothing changed. We even registered him with the El-Waseem Association run by Ibrahim El-Argany, but we got no response. We followed up about four months later, and they told us, “If we find any information, we’ll let you know.” For reference, the serial number we used to register Sherif with the El-Waseem Association was 2870. Can you imagine how many young men are out there, with their families desperately searching for them?”

⁵⁷ A phone conversation with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The witness’s identity has been withheld upon their request. September 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



Yasser Mohamed Salman Suleiman, 17 years old

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights met with a relative of the child Yasser, who told us about Yasser's arbitrary arrest from his home in the city of Arish on February 26, 2018, by a force from the National Security Agency, without presenting any legal warrant.

Since the moment of his arrest, all contact with him was cut off, and his family has been unable to learn of his whereabouts, despite their persistent efforts and inquiries to all official bodies.



The following testimony reveals what Yasser endured in terms of torture, based on accounts from witnesses who met him after his disappearance, as well as the ongoing suffering his family faces in the complete absence of any official information about his fate:⁵⁸

"They took him from the house instead of his brother, Youssef, who they had come to arrest because he had joined ISIS. We've completely lost contact with Youssef, we don't know whether he's alive or dead. They entered the house at around 4 p.m., and Yasser was just about to take a shower. He kept asking, "What do you want?" His sister stood in front of them and said, "No, don't take him, he's the only man left in the house. Our father is already detained, and we don't know anything about our other brother. Please, leave him, he's just a child and hasn't done anything." They told her, "We're just going to ask him a couple of questions and bring him right back."

There were two vehicles from Arish Second Police Station, and with them were National Security officers in plainclothes. They didn't have an arrest warrant or any legal documents, but we knew who they were. The officer in charge was named Haitham. The last thing we heard about Yasser after his arrest came from someone who had been detained with him at the Second Arish Police Station.

He said the last time he saw Yasser was about a week after he was arrested, but he didn't want to describe what Yasser had gone through so as not to upset his mother. Still, Yasser's mother insisted and begged him to tell her what had happened. So, he said they had taken Yasser into a room next to the detention cells and beat him

⁵⁸ A phone conversation with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The witness's name has been withheld upon their request. March 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

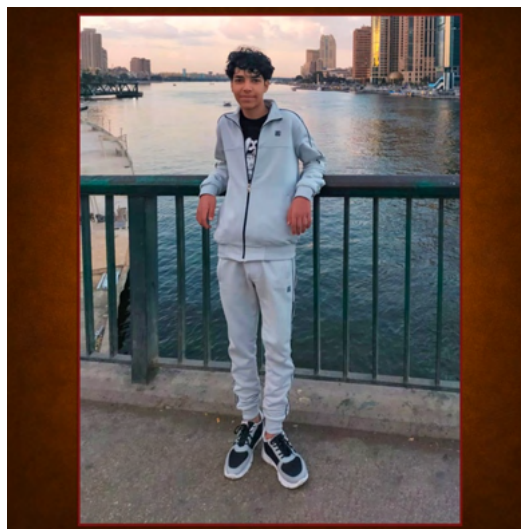


severely. He was screaming in pain, shouting, “I swear I’ll kill you, Youssef!” and cursing his brother. It was understandable, he was being tortured for something he had nothing to do with, and he was lashing out. The other detainees started banging on the cell doors, yelling, “Have some mercy! Enough!” until the torture stopped. That witness said Yasser stayed with them for just one more day, and then they told him, “Get your stuff, you’re leaving.” He thought Yasser had been released, but it seemed more likely he had been transferred somewhere else.

Exactly three months after Yasser was taken, a relative of his father was detained for 40 days. When he was released, he told Yasser’s family that he had seen Yasser in the central prison, but didn’t give any further details. Naturally, the family rushed to the central prison the next day to ask about him. The security officers took his mother’s ID, went inside, and then came back out and said that he wasn’t there. Still, she kept going back and forth to the central prison for seven months, searching. She submitted applications to every organisation that claimed to support victims of enforced disappearance. She even went to the El-Waseem Association run by Ibrahim El-Argany. She registered his case, and after two or three months, they contacted her to complete some paperwork, but told her they still hadn’t found anything and that they would contact her if they did. And now, seven years later, we still don’t know anything about what happened to Yasser, whether he’s alive or dead.”

Omar Othman Salem Salman Abu Obeid, 16 years old

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights met with a relative of 16-year-old child Omar Othman, who reported that Omar was arrested late on the night of 15 November 2024, from his family’s home located in a rural area near Sheikh Zuweid. The arrest was carried out by a force affiliated with the National Security Agency, accompanied by masked men, who conducted the raid without presenting any legal warrant and in a manner that deeply intimidated the entire family. According to the testimony, Omar was



subjected to enforced disappearance for over three months before he appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution on February 24, 2025. The testimony reveals that Omar’s arrest was related to photos found on his mobile phone, depicting remnants of ammunition discovered on his



family's land, photos that were later used as "evidence" against him. The account further highlights the severe torture Omar was subjected to, as well as the harsh conditions of his detention, regardless of being a minor. His treatment dismissed the legal protections afforded to children within Egypt's criminal justice system. While Egyptian law defines anyone under the age of 18 as a child, entitled to specific rights and to be tried before a juvenile court, Omar was instead held in an adult detention facility, denied visits, and prevented from seeing his lawyer, despite being a defendant in Case No. 924 of 2024, registered with the Supreme State Security Prosecution.⁵⁹

"They took Omar late at night, and two days after taking him, they came to the family farm. The family had been displaced from their home and had just settled back down 3 years before. His mother had discovered the presence of ammunition boxes buried in their farm after returning. She went to the police station multiple times to report the matter, but they refused to file an official complaint, telling her it was under the jurisdiction of the military. She then went several times to Battalion 101, where they told her to take pictures and bring them in. She did as instructed, photographing the items and handing them over, but no one ever came to remove them.

One day, an army officer accompanied by armed members of the Tribal Union passed by her farm. She stopped them and asked them to remove the items, but they warned her not to touch them, saying they were dangerous. They told her to mark the spots where she found such objects, and that they would come to remove them. She refused, telling them she wouldn't be able to continue farming if she had to leave such items scattered in the field. Eventually, they removed four ammunition boxes. A few days later, young men from the Tribal Union came and took photos of the remaining items, but said they would not remove them, but said it wasn't something they were allowed or equipped to do, and then walked away.

Omar's mother consistently found such items and put them aside so they could farm their land, and Omar, with the curiosity of a child, took pictures of these objects on his telephone. What we found out was that security went to search the farm after taking Omar because of these pictures. The force that arrested him was from the National Security Agency, accompanied by masked men. They broke down the door of the house and pointed their weapons at the heads of everyone inside. Omar was asleep, and they went in, woke him up and took him blindfolded and restrained.

His mother, to this day, still finds such objects and removes them even after Omar's arrest, and so she went to the Sheikh Zuweid Police Station to file an incident

⁵⁹ Personal interview with the relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The witness's name has been withheld upon their request. March 2025, North Sinai, Egypt



report, but the police chief refused and told her to go to the army instead, saying: “How am I supposed to know if those items are military remnants or that the land was once used as an army checkpoint during the war?” She then went to the 101 Military Battalion to report it, but after waiting for three hours, they refused to let her in, citing that there was a scheduled visit and she could not meet the commander. It was only after Omar appeared before the prosecution that the family learned the remnants collected from the farm had been used as evidence against him.”

Omar was subjected to severe mistreatment, and he told the prosecutor during the investigation: “I endured torture beyond anything imaginable. I was kept handcuffed behind my back for 103 days straight. From the very first night at National Security to the very last, my legs were shackled. For twenty consecutive days, I was hung up and beaten every single day while completely naked. I saw enough electricity to light up Arish for ten years. And woe to me, I came face to face with fear itself.”

Ahmed Waleed Hasan Murad Al-Besaily, 15 years old

Sinai Foundation for Human Rights met with a relative of the child Ahmed Waleed Hassan Murad El-Besaily, who was 15 years old at the time of his arrest on 30 March 2014, while working at a bakery in the Al-Sabeel area of Arish. According to the testimony, a security force from Arish Police Station arrived and arrested him without a legal warrant, and he has been forcibly disappeared ever since. Over the following years, his family tried every possible legal and unofficial avenue to obtain any information about his whereabouts, but to no avail. The following testimony sheds light on the exhausting isolation the family has endured due to the disappearance of their underage son, and their ongoing suffering in the absence of any institutional support or even sympathy from those around them:⁶⁰

“He was working at a bakery in an area called Al-Sabeel. He was alone in the shop at the time, that's what we were told and what I know. His father was in detention back then, and afterward, he really struggled with his mental health. He was living in the area on his own and working at the bakery. We heard from nearby shopkeepers that people from Arish Police Station came and took him, they came asking for him by name. Since that day, we haven't heard a single thing about him. His brother sent telegrams and searched everywhere, but we haven't been able to reach him at all. No one has ever responded to us. They asked about him in every police station, but all we were told was that he wasn't there. Whenever someone is

⁶⁰ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The witness's name has been withheld upon their request. July 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



released from Ismailia or from the police station here, his brother goes to their home, shows them his photo, and asks, “Did you see my brother?” They always say, “No, we haven’t seen him, we don’t know anything about him.” We even tried to reach out to his friends. He didn’t have many, just two or three, but we couldn’t get in touch at first because we didn’t have their numbers. Later, by chance, his brother found out that his friends had been taken before him. He didn’t have many people around him.

“We have no connections except for sending telegrams or asking about him, but no one wants to intervene in something like this. People are scared, especially since my father had been arrested multiple times before. They stay away to protect their own positions. Even my uncle, who worked in the police, was denied a promotion when he tried to help my dad. About a year ago, his brother submitted his case to the Waseem Association, but we never heard back. We provided his birth certificate and a photo, but no one helped or followed up with us in any way. Our psychological state is very difficult. We pray day and night just to know something about him, just to know that he’s alive, to know where he is. When I go visit my husband or father, I always hope to find him there too. I just want to know that he’s alive, to hear any news at all. Is he even alive? Where did they take him? I mean, he didn’t do anything. He was just a kid. And his mother, may God give her strength, her emotional state is terrible. All she wants is to know where he is, just to have some peace of mind. Why is all of this happening? When will he be released? His parents are aging, and the weight of this uncertainty is becoming unbearable.”

Ali Ibrahim Sayed Ahmed Salman, 16 years old

This testimony sheds light on one of dozens of cases that reveal how Egyptian security forces treat children, with no regard for the legal age or the basic safeguards guaranteed by Egyptian and international law for the protection of minors. It recounts what happened to Ali Ibrahim Sayed Ahmed Salman, born on 26 March 1998, who had not yet turned seventeen at the time of his arrest, including his arbitrary detention in a neighborhood in North Sinai, the physical and psychological abuse he endured, his detention in inhumane conditions, repeated torture in police stations and military facilities, and his subsequent disappearance, with no information about his fate to this day. These actions constitute a blatant violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Egyptian Constitution, and all international legal standards that guarantee the dignity and rights of children in detention or during judicial proceedings.



A former detainee who witnessed Ali's arrest and spent time with him in unofficial detention sites, where they were completely cut off from the outside world, recounted:⁶¹

"It was around the fifth day of Eid al-Fitr, approximately July 21, 2015. We were out late on the street, it was still Eid, and people were out celebrating and visiting each other. We were a group of young men hanging out, just like many other groups of youth. In front of one of the houses, around midnight, the homeowner called out to us and said, 'The police truck is coming down the street.' We all ran. I looked back and saw that Ali wasn't moving. I went back to him and asked, 'Why aren't you running?' He said, 'I'm not running, I haven't done anything.' He refused to move, so I stayed with him. The police truck stopped in front of us. There was an officer sitting in the front. He spoke to us in a casual tone, asking, 'Where are you going, boys?' A soldier dressed in military uniform got out and told the officer, 'There were two with them, and they ran off.' The officer said, 'Get in the truck.' We got in with the soldiers, and they took us to the Rommana police station. They took our phones and watches, we were left with only our clothes. They made us sit in the corridor in front of the station's duty officer's desk for about an hour, then moved us into a cell.

The cell was completely dark, with no light inside except a bit coming from the duty station outside. It was about 6 by 10 meters and had two toilets. It held around 100 people. Most of them were from the Sawarka tribe, along with a few Bedouins from other nearby villages. There was no space to sit or sleep because of how crowded it was. Someone we knew had spotted us and had us sit near the toilets in a small area where water had pooled. Ali stayed awake all night, and I slept with my head resting on a water bottle. We spent the whole next day there. During that time, we ate from the food that other detainees received during their visits. The army didn't give us anything to eat, and our families couldn't visit us, because they didn't even know where we were.

Around midnight, the officer who had arrested us came in with two soldiers. They were using a phone flashlight to light the way until they reached where Ali and I were sitting. They told us to get up and took us out into the hallway. Then the officer told the soldiers, 'Make them crawl, both of them.' They forced us to crawl with our hands tied behind our backs, dragging ourselves with our legs and chests. They made us carry each other and run, and the officer beat us with a belt the whole time, without asking a single question or saying anything else. While hitting us, they kept shouting things like, 'You Muslim Brotherhood bastards!' and cursed our

⁶¹ A personal interview with a witness and survivor of enforced disappearance. The name of the witness has been withheld upon their request. December 2020, North Sinai, Egypt



mothers with filthy insults. We had no idea why any of this was happening to us. They kept beating us for an hour and a half, maybe two, before finally throwing us back into the cell. We stayed there until midnight the next day, when they came and took us out of the cell again. They brought us to Colonel Kahoush's office on the second floor. There were about six officers in the room, of varying ranks. They stood us next to each other, and he began interrogating us. But the so-called interrogation was just a series of accusations and questions; we weren't even allowed to respond. Every time he asked something, the soldiers would slap us. He was saying things like: 'How many cars did you burn in Nagila village? Why did you blow up Karam al-Qawadis? Were you protesting in Rabaa al-Adawiya? Are you receiving support from the extremists?' And while he was questioning us, the soldiers kept hitting us nonstop, not giving us a chance to speak. Ali collapsed during the torture, so the officer asked him, 'Do you have diabetes or something?' He said no. They took us outside the room and told a soldier to bring sugar water and elevate his legs, just as basic first aid. Ten minutes later, they brought us back in. I tried to appeal to the officer emotionally. I said, 'Sir, why are you doing this to us? Please, think of us like your own sons.' He shouted back, 'My son memorises the Qur'an. He's religious and upright. What we're doing here has nothing to do with religion.' I didn't know what to say. I couldn't understand why they were saying these things to us. All the while, the soldiers continued beating and torturing us, and the officer himself also hit us. This lasted for about half an hour, then he told the soldiers to take us back to the cell. On the way, they kept beating us until we were back in the cell. It was around 2 a.m.

We stayed there until the following night after dinner. Then the same officer came back with a soldier, took us out into the corridor, and stood Ali and me side by side. He said to Ali, 'Who are you reporting our movements to?' and began beating both of us again while we kept swearing that we had nothing to do with any of this. Then he took me aside, put his hand on my shoulder, and walked me about three meters away from Ali. There were two electric wires hanging from the ceiling. He said, "This is simple, just a few words and you're out. Your case is easy, we'll let you go. Just tell me: who is Ali reporting our movements to?" I said, "Sir, Ali is my long-time friend. He's just a poor kid, and we've always stuck together. We're not involved in anything like that." He slapped me twice and said, "Then let's see who's going to get you and Ali out of here."

After that, they took us back to the cell.

About four days later, our families started being allowed to visit. Sometimes we were brought out to see them, and they'd bring us food and clothes. That went on



for about 25 days. Then, on the night of 14 August 2015, some soldiers came and took the two of us, along with two others, up to Colonel Osama on the second floor. He only asked one question: “What are your names?” He took our names, then we were taken back to the cell.

On the morning of August 15, 2015, at around 7 a.m., they opened our cell and called us out, there were 14 of us. They took us upstairs, and we were handed over to an officer, I think his name was Adel. I asked him where we were going, and he said, “You’re being transferred to Battalion 101.” I asked if I could call my family to let them know, and he said no. They put us in a police truck and drove us to the village of Masfaq, where an armored vehicle was waiting. It accompanied us, with soldiers, Officer Adel, and the driver in the vehicle with us. We arrived at Battalion 101 around noon, just as the call to prayer was sounding. We weren’t blindfolded, and we could see the soldiers at the gate. Then they had us get out right at the gate. A soldier inside the battalion called out, asking, “How are they not blindfolded?” So the soldiers quickly blindfolded us and led us into a room. Before we entered, they took everything we had on us, even the slippers we were wearing, leaving us only in the clothes on our backs. Once inside, they removed our blindfolds. The room was about 3 by 4 meters, with a tiny bathroom roughly 1 by 0.5 meters in size. The door was made of metal, and there was a small ventilation opening around 10 cm by 75 cm. We stayed there until nighttime. During that time, they brought us an old serving tray with extremely dry pasta, Ali refused to eat it. There was also a 20-liter Jerrycan for use as a toilet. There were about 20 of us crammed into that room.

After the Ishā (evening) prayer, they took me, Ali, and about ten others for interrogation. They blindfolded us and led us out, each of us placing a hand on the shoulder of the one in front. After about 200 meters, they stopped us in what I think was a road inside the battalion; I say that because we were barefoot and could feel the ground. We heard cars passing by. They made us sit for about an hour and a half. We were so exhausted we ended up falling asleep leaning on each other. Then they started calling us in one by one for interrogation. I think I went in third, before Ali. When I entered, it was air-conditioned and the floor was tiled. The voice speaking to me was about ten meters away. The first question was: “What brought you here?” I told him I was walking at midnight without my ID, and the officer took me to the station, then I ended up here and I don’t know why. I tried to make it seem like it was a misunderstanding, that I was only taken because I didn’t have my ID. I also said that I hadn’t done anything to deserve being here and didn’t know what had been said about me. He responded, “You’re Muslim Brotherhood, you son of a bitch.” I said, “Sir, I’m not with the Brotherhood and never have been.” There was another voice, from someone with a Bedouin accent, speaking with the interrogator,



but I didn't recognise him. Then the officer conducting the interrogation came over, slapped me with his hand and kicked me with his foot. I told him, "Sir, the blindfold is coming off," and someone tied it back on. I realised it was a soldier standing next to me. I stayed in that interrogation for around fifteen minutes, then they took me back to the road. Then they called in Ali. he stayed there for about 45 minutes, then they brought him out. After they finished interrogating the rest, they led us back to the cell in the same formation. We removed our blindfolds and sat together; Ali and I told each other what had happened to us. Ali told me that he was interrogated by an officer and two Bedouins. They also asked him, "What brought you here?" He told them he was taken off the street and didn't know why he was brought here. One of the Bedouins asked, "Do you know the owner of the salt pan in Al-Rawda Village?" Ali said, "No, I don't." Then they started asking, "Are you Muslim Brotherhood? Who are you monitoring army movements for? Why are you watching the roads?" Ali denied everything, but one of them told him, "Don't deny it, we know all of Bir al-Abd is Brotherhood." Then they let him go.

We stayed in the cell until the night of 24 August 2015. At around 9 p.m., they took us out for interrogation again; same process, same place, same group. Before taking us in, they sprayed us with air freshener because we smelled bad from the lack of water and not being able to change clothes. We looked terrible. This time, I went in after Ali. As soon as I entered, I recognised the voice of the same officer who interrogated me the first time, and I heard a Bedouin man's voice too. There were three soldiers around me. As soon as I entered the office, the officer said, "Be quick, kid. Do you want to go to Marina or not?" I replied, "What's Marina?" He said, "That's where all the Muslim Brotherhood guys go," and they started beating me. I started crying and screaming from the torture. The officer was asking questions and told me, "Make the Rabaa sign," but I was scared and refused. The soldiers were burning my hands with a lighter. This lasted about half an hour, then the officer said, "Take him out." After they took me out, the Bedouin man followed me into the hallway and said, "You're Brotherhood? Get down and do push-ups," while cursing me and burning the back of my neck with a lighter. That went on for about half an hour, then the Bedouin told two soldiers, "Take care of them," and they beat us all the way back to the cell. Ali wasn't with me, he was in a different cell. I stayed there for about four days. They brought in new detainees to the cell Ali had been moved to. They were from Rafah, and they were being brutally tortured. So they brought Ali back to my cell to make space for torturing the new arrivals more freely. When Ali came back to my cell, we talked. He told me, "They didn't ask me much, but I heard you screaming inside while they were torturing you." He said his interrogation was just "What's your name? Make the Rabaa sign," which he refused, and then some basic questions. Then they said, "Take him



to Marina.” That’s when I understood that “Marina” was the name they gave to the small cell they’d put Ali in. Ali stayed with me for one day, then they moved him back to the other cell—Marina. The next day was a Friday. Prison transport trucks arrived, and I looked out from the small opening in our cell door. An officer called out Ali’s name. Ali answered, and the officer said, “You’re the Brotherhood guy from Bir al-Abd?” Then he slapped him a few times and took him, along with a few others, to a transport truck. That was the last time I saw Ali. I kept asking the soldiers about him, but no one said anything. That’s when I was sure they had taken him somewhere else.

A month after Ali was transferred, I was released; my total detention lasted about 45 days. It was the fifth day of Eid al-Adha, specifically on 19 September 2015. Before I was released, the numbers were increasing, and the cells were overcrowded. The room that was 3×4 meters ended up with 71 people inside. Three people died with us in the cell. One of them I remember was from Rafah, living in Gelbanah, and he had a heart condition. Two days before he died, he became ill and started foaming at the mouth. We kept calling for the soldier outside. He came in and saw the man lying on his back, visibly ill. The soldier kicked him in the stomach with his boot and the man sat up from the force of the kick. Then he just left. We kept asking about the officer because of the overcrowding and the sick people, and they said he was on pilgrimage and not there. They kept bringing in people, but no one was being released. It actually got to the point where we were all standing; there was no space to sit. Fever and heat symptoms started appearing among most prisoners due to overcrowding. We would knock on the door, yelling: “People are dying, bring us a doctor.” No one paid any attention to us. Among those who died was a nurse named Muslim, he was about 45 years old, from Rafah. And an old man around 70, taken from an olive farm with his sons. His sons were released, but he stayed and died inside. All three men were found dead on the same day as that day was extremely hot, around 09 September 2015. On the first days we arrived, they brought in someone who had been shot in the leg, to the point where the bullet had split the bone, it was clearly visible to us. They had wrapped it with a white bandage, and we could smell the rot coming from his leg as he sat. There were also people with diabetes, and still no one brought them anything. Anyway, until I was released, I still knew nothing about Ali. Even to this day. Ali was 16, he hadn’t even turned 17 yet. I was just one year older than him.”



Section 6: The Medical Negligence in the Depths of the Abyss

“Of course, there were absolutely no family visits as no one knew where we were; If someone lost any underclothes or even outerwear, they had nothing to replace them with. That is unless someone was released and left behind clothes others could wear. Diseases were widespread inside the cells, like diarrhea. It was caused by the food and the fact that we were all drinking from the same water source. Not to mention the extreme heat and poor ventilation. Scabies was spreading in a horrifying way; people couldn’t stop scratching their bodies. Diarrhea was constant, and so was the abdominal pain. People were wasting due to severe malnutrition.”

Interview with a Victim, Age 35, Subjected to Enforced Disappearance for 7 Months

In the unofficial detention facilities operated by Egyptian authorities, deliberate medical neglect constitutes a systematic component of the abuse faced by victims of enforced disappearance. Alongside torture and inhumane detention conditions, these individuals are denied their fundamental right to healthcare; an egregious violation of Egypt’s obligations under international law, particularly the Convention Against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Field testimonies collected by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights document a recurring pattern of intentional denial of treatment for the wounded, neglect of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, and respiratory conditions, as well as the failure to provide medical care for injuries resulting from torture, allowing such injuries to reach critical stages. The inhumane conditions of detention—marked by extreme overcrowding, lack of ventilation, scarcity of clean water, absence of hygiene, and poor nutrition—contribute to the spread of skin diseases like scabies and intestinal illnesses, amid total neglect by facility administrators. Testimonies show how this situation is exacerbated by authorities’ refusal to respond to requests for treatment or transfer urgent cases to hospitals, putting detainees’ lives and safety in constant danger.

In one testimony, a detainee describes how he lost his hearing completely after a violent blow to the head. Despite doctors' warnings, he was denied necessary medical care and was forcibly returned to an overcrowded cell instead of being treated at a hospital. In another testimony, signs of collective medical neglect are evident: skin and intestinal diseases spread among detainees without any medical intervention, and requests for treatment were either ignored or met with violence, an incident that starkly illustrates the disregard detention authorities show for human life and health. These and other testimonies reveal a systematic pattern of medical neglect in unofficial detention sites, reflecting not merely institutional failure, but the use of neglect as an additional tool of repression that deepens detainees’ suffering and deprives them of their most basic rights to life and dignity.



In the context of severe health violations against forcibly disappeared individuals, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights has documented repeated cases of denying medical treatment to injured detainees, despite the seriousness of their conditions, often resulting in further health complications. A survivor, aged 60, recounts what he endured during his six-month period of enforced disappearance in one of the unofficial detention sites:⁶²

“They kept hitting me randomly on my head and eyes until one blow landed on my ear and I lost my hearing completely. I couldn't hear anymore, and I had a severe, persistent headache. After the intense beating, they took me back to the cell, where I stayed with 25 other people. The pain kept getting worse for 20 days, and they refused to give me any medicine. My hearing was completely gone. Every day, my fellow inmates would knock on the door asking the guards to take me to a doctor, but the soldiers would just open the door and beat us again. After much pleading, they finally took me to the hospital. The doctor said the condition was critical and that I needed to be admitted. The guard accompanying me insisted on taking me back to prison, even though the doctor was saying: “He cannot be discharged from here.” They forced me out and brought me back to the cell.”

In the context of systematic medical neglect at Battalion 101, one of the unofficial detention sites run by the military in the city of Arish, a forcibly disappeared detainee, aged 50, who was held incommunicado for four months since 30 February 2020, recounts his experience. He describes how the absence of medical care and the deliberate neglect of illnesses and injuries caused his health to deteriorate severely during his time at Battalion 101:⁶³

“When I arrived at Battalion 101, they took me to the ward, and I stayed there for about five months without any investigations. The doctor would come around and ask if we were feeling unwell. Anyone who complained would get a single pill for any issue, the same pill for everyone. There was no variation in medication or real treatment. There were no examinations, no diagnosis, and anyone who was sick just stayed that way.

After that, I was moved to solitary confinement, and the interrogation began. I experienced torture, beatings, and being suspended. I was screaming inside solitary, feeling like I was going to die. They would only open the door once a day so I could use the toilet. The rest of the time I was locked in, so I urinated in a bottle, and I couldn't defecate unless they opened the door. I started to feel dizzy and had severe stomach pain, probably from hunger, and I couldn't even go to the bathroom.

⁶² Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The identity of the victim has been withheld upon their request. May 2021, North Sinai, Egypt

⁶³ Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The identity of the victim has been withheld upon their request. November 2020, North Sinai, Egypt.



When the doctor came, he gave me that same pill he gave everyone. It did nothing. I stayed in the same condition for several days, and the pain kept getting worse. I felt like I was dying slowly. I spent 16 days in solitary, some of the hardest days of my life. Every day I got the same medication, no improvement, no change, and they refused to transfer me to a hospital. Until during one interrogation, I almost died in their hands. The officer said, “We’ll take you to the hospital to check on you.” They transported me in an armored vehicle to El-Arish Military Hospital. There wasn’t even IV fluid there, so they had to send a soldier to the public hospital in El-Arish to get one. I was given IV fluid, then returned to the battalion. The next day, thank God, they released me. When I entered, I weighed about 100 kilograms. When I got out and my family saw me, they broke down in tears and took me to the doctor. I weighed only 70 kilograms. I had anemia, jaundice, high blood sugar, and a slipped disc in my neck. I couldn’t even lift a water bottle to drink and could only pray while sitting in a chair.”

Among the testimonies documented by Sinai Foundation for Human Rights regarding the deliberate medical neglect faced by forcibly disappeared persons in unofficial detention sites, is the case of **Moamen Ahmed Mostafa Ibrahim Bakir**, 23 years old, who suffers from a chronic mental illness which was medically documented years before. Despite the clear nature of his condition and the authorities’ full knowledge of it, he continued to be held in an inhumane environment with no appropriate medical care whatsoever, in direct violation of international standards for the protection of persons with special health needs in detention settings. A testimony from one of his relatives illustrates how the absence of medical care deepened the family’s anguish as they remain unaware of his fate after ten years of enforced disappearance.⁶⁴

“We still don’t know what happened to Moamen, or even whether he is alive. For the record, we are patriotic people and have never been affiliated with any opposition parties. Moamen was arrested on 16 June 2015, right in front of our neighbors in Abu Saqal neighborhood, by a military patrol associated with Battalion 101. The reason was that his national ID card expired and was damaged. We went and asked one of the guards at the entrance to Battalion 101. He called over one of the officers, who confirmed that Moamen was indeed being held inside Battalion 101. People who were arrested from Abu Saqal and later released also confirmed that he had been there. On Wednesday, 24 June 2015, we asked at the office of the Military Advisor at the North Sinai Governorate, They told us that he was at Battalion 101 and not to worry, that it was routine questioning and he would be released. We sent in a report via intelligence authorities confirming that Moamen suffers from a mental illness; he has psychosis. His condition is obvious:

⁶⁴ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The name of the witness has been withheld upon request. April 2025, North Sinai, Egypt



he hallucinates, says irrational and nonexistent things, behaves abnormally, and is clearly not in control of his speech or actions. We have many medical reports proving his condition, and all our neighbors in Abu Saqal know about it.

He was arrested over his ID card, and I tried everything to renew it so I could give it to them and have him released. I went to the Civil Registry in Arish, and they asked me to get a permit from the Public Prosecution. Unfortunately, the prosecution office in Arish wasn't operating at the time due to the security situation. I had to travel to Ismailia and explain the matter to the Director of North Sinai Prosecutions there. He asked me to get a statement proving that Moamen was detained. I went to Azouly military prison in Ismailia, but no one would give me any confirmation that he was being held by the army. Moamen needs to take his medication regularly; his condition severely deteriorates without it. After all this time, we just want to know if he's still alive, and what his condition is now."

The following testimony from a survivor of enforced disappearance illustrates the inadequate medical care in Azouly Military Prison, where skin diseases and infections spread without any effective medical intervention, alongside a complete lack of basic healthcare and failure to respond to critical medical cases that led to deaths. The testimony reveals the daily suffering caused by the absence of medical care, the degrading treatment of the sick, and the authorities' disregard for detainees' lives, which constitutes a violation of the right to health and life:⁶⁵

"The worst thing inside was the scabies, it destroyed us. I mean it. Then there were the boils. I once complained to another detainee, told him I had a boil on my right leg and another on the left. He said, 'Be quiet, I've got 25 boils!' So I stayed silent. The scabies, it itches and eats at your skin day and night. You can't sit still. It spreads fast. And there were other illnesses, too. But the worst pain was from our teeth. When the pain hit, you couldn't do anything. Every day brought a new sickness.

The whole time in Azouly, I kept thinking: how do I recover from all this sickness? How do I sleep when I'm starving? Sometimes the absurdity of it all was unbearable: a soldier outside would call out, 'One of you come take medicine for the others.' One prisoner would go out. The soldier would ask, 'How many in your cell have scabies?' (There were 100 people in the cell.) He'd say, 'Ten have scabies, ten have a cough,' and so on. Then the soldier would hand him a handful of pills, same pills for everyone, and say, 'Give them these.' No labels, no names. And we

⁶⁵ Personal interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The identity of the victim has been withheld upon their request. April 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



couldn't even see what the pills were, we're in the dark. Everyone just thought they were getting different medicine, but it was all the same.

People died inside from exhaustion and illness. The most heartbreaking thing I saw was an elderly man, from Sheikh Zuwaid or Rafah. He was really sick, barely hanging on. One of the other detainees, may God reward him, stayed by his side and helped him. The old man couldn't speak anymore. We kept shouting: 'He's dying, officer! He's dying!' After an hour and a half, the guard finally yelled back at us, cursing: 'What do you want now?' We told him, 'The man isn't moving. He's dead.' Another hour and a half passed before they opened the door. The guard said: 'Put him on a blanket and lay him outside.' They left him outside the cell from 2 a.m. until 7:30 a.m., lying there lifeless on the ground. Then an officer came by, looked at him, and said, 'He's dead?' and told the soldiers, 'Alright, move him.'"

The following testimony reflects a case of severe medical neglect inside one of the detention facilities, marked by the authorities' disregard for urgent pleas to assist an elderly detainee who was experiencing difficulty breathing. Despite the clear severity of his condition, he was transferred and placed in solitary confinement without any medical supervision, which led to a deterioration in his health and ultimately to his death, according to the account of a fellow detainee who had been with him during the transfer and detention. This testimony highlights a blatant violation of the right to life and access to healthcare, as guaranteed in international human rights law, and sheds light on practices that amount to deliberate neglect. Shadi, one of the victims who was subjected to enforced disappearance for a year, from October 2019 to October 2020, said:⁶⁶

"I was in State Security, and in the room with me was an elderly man, about 75 years old, named Hassan or Hussein Hijab. They took him because he was a pensioner who owned a private car he used to make a living, and once, a woman he didn't know rode with him and he gave her a lift to the village of Al-Midan. Later, during his interrogation at National Security, he found out that she was the wife of someone affiliated with ISIS. Uncle Hussein was very unwell and didn't speak at all. He kept complaining that he couldn't breathe. So they took him and placed him in solitary confinement. Later, when we were being transferred to the central prison, he was with us in the armoured vehicle, lying there silent except for saying "I need oxygen, I need oxygen." Of course, they didn't respond to him, they thought he was exaggerating. When we arrived at the central prison, they put me in Room 6, and the elderly man was placed in solitary confinement in the room next to mine. Three days later, the man passed away."

⁶⁶ Telephone interview with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The identity of the victim has been withheld upon request. May 2025, North Sinai, Egypt



Chapter 2: Enforced Disappearance from the Families' Perspective

“Narratives of Forced Disappearance”

“His mother lives clinging to the faintest thread of hope that she’ll see him again. He’s been forcibly disappeared for nearly six years now, and to this day her children still try to convince her to attend family events, but she always refuses. It’s the grief inside her. She still has hope, of course. Two of her sons live with her at home. They try to ease her pain, but how much comfort can they really bring? No one can replace someone you’ve lost.”

Testimony of a relative of Saleh Naji Salman, who has been forcibly disappeared since Dec. 2018

Section One: The Search for the Forcibly Disappeared

In their search for their forcibly disappeared loved ones, families traverse multiple paths, both legal and informal, through official and unofficial channels, in a desperate attempt to uncover the fate of their relatives. Are they still alive? Are they in good health? How do they spend their days? Are they safe or living in constant fear? Do they even know what is happening in the world beyond the walls of their secret detention? These are pressing questions for which no clear answers are given, only a life suspended, marked by psychological pain too heavy for the walls of any home or the hearts of those worn thin by years of uncertainty. Years in which families cannot tell whether they are awaiting a longed-for reunion, or vainly trying to close a wound that refuses to heal.

“I didn’t know how to send telegrams, but I had heard about them and someone told me to try. But people warned me that if I did, they’d target my brother and fabricate a case against him. They said it would be better to ask about him quietly, without filing any complaints. I even asked the Peshmerga, and they told me that I can’t file reports against the army, that I would be detained as well.”

Testimony of a Relative of a Victim of Enforced Disappearance Since 20 Dec. 2015⁶⁷

According to the Egyptian Code of Criminal Procedure, specifically Articles (24) to (27), any citizen has the right to file a report at a police station, as police officers are considered judicial officers. Furthermore, Article (189) of the Egyptian Constitution states that “the Public

⁶⁷ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The name of the witness has been withheld upon their request. February 2021, North Sinai, Egypt



Prosecution, in accordance with the legal framework, acts on behalf of society and represents it and the public interest in criminal cases.” This means that the prosecutor is a representative of the people and acts in their interest. However, the reality in Egypt often contradicts this framework. Official bodies frequently refuse to register reports or accept complaints.

The foundation has documented testimonies that reveal this obstruction of access to justice. One such account was given by a relative of **Hossam Saleh Suleiman Selim**, who has been subjected to enforced disappearance since 2019:⁶⁸

“Someone advised his family to send a telegram to the Public Prosecutor, and I went with his father to send it from the Bir al-Abd post office. The postal employee refused to accept it and told us, ‘You’ll be getting yourselves into trouble.’” The sister of one of the disappeared also recounted that a judicial officer refused to file a report documenting her brother’s disappearance.



This official conduct intersects with the pattern of societal adaptation adopted by the people of North Sinai. Interviews conducted by Sinai Foundation for Human Rights revealed that out of 59 documented cases of enforced disappearance, only 17 individuals submitted official complaints. This indicates a sharp, perhaps total, erosion of trust in the security apparatus, coupled with a deep fear of engaging with it, especially within a close-knit tribal society like that of Sinai. One survivor of enforced disappearance, aged 26, who was held incommunicado for 10 months, told us:⁶⁹

“I didn’t want my family to hire a lawyer to look for me, I felt it was pointless. From what I saw and heard from others who went through similar experiences, it never leads to anything. While I was detained and disappeared, I used to wish they would save their effort and money, it all felt useless. A lawyer is only relevant if a formal case is brought; otherwise, there’s no real role for them.”

As the sister of one of the forcibly disappeared told us, arbitrary arrests had become so common that fear prevented families from taking any official steps:⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The name of the witness has been withheld upon their request. July 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

⁶⁹ Telephone call with a survivor of enforced disappearance. The identity of the victim has been withheld upon their request. May 2025, North Sinai, Egypt

⁷⁰ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The name of the witness has been withheld upon their request. September 2022, North Sinai, Egypt



“We didn’t file any reports. Most people here are taken in for questioning and then released, so we were just waiting for her to come out. We didn’t want to tell anyone in case that caused problems. We were afraid that if we filed a complaint, they might call us in for interrogation. My husband told me, ‘Let’s not ask questions or stir things up. Best to stay quiet until we understand what’s going on.’”

The local community is not without individuals who maintain close ties to security agencies or to clan elders appointed by the government. These figures are often approached as informal intermediaries to obtain information from the authorities. In return for promises to help secure the release of the disappeared or to uncover their whereabouts, they often seek personal gain, such as money or electoral loyalty. This dynamic exists amid widespread fear among families of filing official complaints, due to the risk of retaliation. One relative of **Ahmed Waleed Hassan**, who has been forcibly disappeared since 2017, said:⁷¹

“We have no connections except for sending telegrams or asking about him, but no one wants to intervene in something like this. People are scared, especially since my father had been arrested multiple times before. They stay away to protect their own positions. Even my uncle, who worked in the police, was denied a promotion when he tried to help my dad.”

A relative of **Suleiman Abdel Shafi Ahmed Abdel Aal**, aged 19, who was arrested on 14 December 2017, told us about his efforts to reach out to tribal elders and representatives for help in locating him:⁷²

“We’re from the Fawakhriya tribe, and we spoke with our representatives in parliament, they told us to wait and that things would be fine, but nothing changed. The sheikhs were in the same position; it was clear they couldn’t do anything. The MP representing the Fawakhriya is a friend of mine, he told me to wait and promised he’d get him out, but sadly, nothing happened. It’s been eight years now with no news. We’ve tried every possible way to find him.”

Against this backdrop, informal avenues such as seeking personal mediation or submitting requests through local civil society organisations have become the most prominent option for families attempting to uncover the fate of their disappeared relatives. This tendency can be attributed to several factors, including the tribal nature of the local society, limited awareness of available legal pathways, and deteriorating living conditions, particularly following the waves of displacement carried out by the Egyptian military in several parts of North Sinai. This was recounted by a relative

⁷¹ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The name of the witness has been withheld upon their request. July 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

⁷² Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The name of the witness has been withheld upon their request. August 2021, North Sinai, Egypt



of **Ismail Khalaf Mohsen Ayada**, 18 years old, who has been forcibly disappeared since December 2017:⁷³

“Our situation is really difficult. Ismail is the youngest of 14 siblings. He was arrested seven years ago, and we haven’t heard anything about him since. His mother cries every day and she has developed high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart problems. We’re displaced from our hometown, and we received no compensation, no housing. We ended up living in makeshift shelters, places unfit for any human being. Every now and then we go ask about him. It’s been seven years. We just want to know where he is, so his mother can see him before anything happens to her. He was just a kid, not involved in anything. He was taken during a time of heightened security, and we thought he’d be released once things calmed down. Now it’s been seven years. Just tell us where he is, even if you’re going to keep him.”

After exhausting all formal and informal avenues, families are left with nothing but fragile hope, resorting to any entity that might offer even the slightest clue. The organisation has observed an increasing reliance on local charitable associations, foremost among them "Al-Waseem Association", affiliated with the well-known Sinai businessman Ibrahim Al-Argani. Among the cases of enforced disappearance featured in this report, at least 12 families have submitted requests to the association in a desperate attempt to uncover the fate of their loved ones. This was the case for the family of **Salem Mohamed Al-Menei**, aged 34, who has been forcibly disappeared since 21 August 2019, according to one of his relatives: ⁷⁴

“We asked about him at the police stations, but they said he wasn’t there, and no one gave us any information. A month ago, we submitted his name to an association called Al-Waseem, affiliated with Ibrahim Al-Argani, and handed in a copy of his ID card; the tribal elders told us that by doing so, we’d be able to find out where he is.”

As personal mediations and local associations have become the most prominent, and at times the only route families take to uncover the fate of their missing loved ones, those who choose to pursue legal avenues often face punitive consequences. The foundation has observed that the small number of families who attempt to file official complaints or follow legal procedures have

⁷³ Telephone interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. March 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

⁷⁴ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. February 2021, North Sinai, Egypt



frequently been met with retaliatory responses. This was reflected in the account of a relative of **Mohamed Mohamed Suleiman**, who has been forcibly disappeared since 2016:⁷⁵

"We sent faxes to the intelligence and security agencies, and we asked about him in every police station and security office, but we got nowhere and no one responded. We tried to find intermediaries, but no one was willing to intervene. After we made a lot of noise and filed numerous complaints, the National Security started visiting us several times. They took his brother and sister in for questioning, asking them what they knew about him, who his friends were, and when they last saw him, then released them afterwards."

In some of the rare cases where families chose to break through the barrier of fear and file missing persons reports to prove their relatives had been forcibly disappeared, the response from security agencies was unambiguous: they directly threatened the family and warned them against taking any further legal steps. This is what a relative of **Ahmed Hamad Mohamed Selim**, who has been forcibly disappeared since 20 October 2015, told the foundation:

"After his wife sent faxes to the Presidency, police informants "mokhberin" came to her house and told her not to submit anything again."

In the face of continued official denial of enforced disappearances and the security agencies' refusal to disclose the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared, families find themselves compelled to resort to unofficial means in search of any lead that might bring them closer to their loved ones. Through interviews with several victims' families, the foundation has documented a recurring pattern in which families rely on the testimonies of survivors of enforced disappearance or those who have been released, as one of the few available avenues to gain any insight into the fate of the disappeared.

A relative of **Ahmed Hamad Mohamed Selim**, 46 years old, from the Al-Masa'id tribe, who was arrested by army forces on 20 October 2015, recounts their journey in search of him:⁷⁶

"Many people from the Al-Masa'id tribe in the village of Gelbana were arrested, and Ahmed was one of them. It was a military raid going house to house, randomly detaining young men. They came to Ahmed's house, forced his family outside, searched the house, then told him to come with them and took him away. The first news we got about him was in 2018, from someone in the village who had been arrested at the same time. He told us Ahmed was with him in Al-Azouli Prison in

⁷⁵Telephone interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. June 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

⁷⁶ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. October 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



Ismailia. We went to the prison and asked about him, but they told us he had been released and was no longer there. After that, we heard nothing more until 2022, when we learned that another young man from the same group had been released. We visited him and asked about Ahmed. He said Ahmed had been transferred from Al-Azouli to Battalion 101, and that they had met there. He also said Ahmed was very ill and suffering from high blood sugar. When we asked about him again, we were told not to inquire anymore. Since then, we've had no further information."

The foundation also spoke with a relative of **Mohamed Mohamed Suleiman Ibrahim**, 19 years old, who was arrested by army forces on 05 April 2016. He said:⁷⁷

"There was a football match by the beach in Arish that he went to watch with his friends. We heard that the army launched a raid on the beach and took people from there. When I found out, I called him around midnight, but his phone was already switched off, that's when I knew he'd been taken. I went and asked around; locals told me the army came and took him and his friends and a large group of people while they were watching the match. In 2018, I read on a Facebook page called 'Khawatir Sinawi' that one of his friends had been released. We visited him and asked about Mohamed, he said they had been detained together at Al-Galaa in Ismailia and described the clothes Mohamed was wearing, which matched exactly what he had on when he was taken. His father sent telegrams to all the security agencies and inquired at every police station and detention center, but got no response at all. We tried to find people to intervene, to pull some strings, but no one was willing to get involved. Even though it was the army that took Mohamed, State Security kept coming to the house and eventually detained his father and older brother, asking them what they knew about Mohamed, who his friends were, and when they last saw him."

But in many cases, these informal avenues, such as directly asking survivors of enforced disappearance or recently released detainees, lead nowhere, leaving families disheartened and without answers.

The brother of **Hussein**, 39 years old, who was arrested on June 14, 2015, recounted that his efforts yielded nothing, despite asking several former detainees whether they had seen or heard anything about his brother during their time in custody:⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Telephone interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. June 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

⁷⁸ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. May 2025, North Sinai, Egypt



“Honestly, we tried to reach out through intermediaries, people who knew officers in the Al-Zohour area, including 'Lieutenant Colonel Khaled,' who was reportedly in charge of a special forces group they called 'the cell.' We were told that some civilians worked with them in that cell, armed by the gypsum unit, we call them the 'Peshmerga', some were young men from Sheikh Zuweid, others from Bedouin tribes. Through these contacts, we learned that those arrested, including Hussein, were transferred to Battalion 101 in Arish that same night. And then, less than a month later, Hussein was moved to Al-Azouli prison, according to people who were later released. They told us they saw our brother and that he would send us greetings through anyone being released. But after around four months in Al-Azouli, the news stopped entirely. Over the years, we've heard stories from people claiming to have seen him, but whenever we try to follow up on them, they turn out to be false leads... and we get nowhere.”

Families also try to turn to lawyers in their search for their disappeared loved ones, despite their belief in the limited effectiveness of this path, due to the lack of cooperation from security agencies, which refuse to provide any information. This is illustrated by a testimony documented by Sinai Foundation in an interview with a relative of **Abdelkarim Ghanem Abdullah Ali**, 23 years old, who was arrested from the family home on September 4, 2019:⁷⁹

“We hired many lawyers to follow up on his case, but whenever they go to ask about him in the prisons, no one gives them any answers. At first, the lawyer said he heard that he was at State Security in Ismailia, then he said he'd been moved to another prison. We ourselves asked at the National Security in Ismailia through intermediaries to verify, but they said he wasn't there. The last news we got was two or three years ago from someone who was released from detention in Arish; he said he saw them, but didn't know exactly where. Probably at National Security.”

Some of the interviews conducted by the foundation add another dimension to the suffering, namely the attempts made by some of the disappeared to reassure their families through indirect messages relayed via other detainees who are later released. These messages often carry brief signals to indicate that they are still alive.

This pattern of testimonies highlights the depth of the humanitarian and legal crisis surrounding enforced disappearance, a crime that strips victims' families of their most basic rights to truth and reassurance. It forces them to seek out unofficial, often disappointing and exploitative, channels

⁷⁹ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. January 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



in their search. This reality underscores the extent of official obfuscation, the absence of transparency, and the lack of accountability in handling the fate of those held in unlawful detention.

Section 2: Second: Exploiting Families Emotionally and Financially

In continuation of the heavy burdens borne by the families of the forcibly disappeared, and in light of the complete closure of official avenues for justice, many of them find themselves compelled to pursue unofficial or even unlawful channels in hopes of obtaining information or securing the release of their loved ones. However, these alternative paths often become fertile ground for exploitation and extortion, as some lawyers or civilian intermediaries claim to have connections with security agencies and demand large sums of money in exchange for promises to uncover the fate of the disappeared or to mediate for their release, without providing any tangible results or guarantees.

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights interviewed a relative of **Saleh Nagi Suleiman**, 41 years old, who has been forcibly disappeared since December 9, 2018. In his testimony, the relative revealed how despair, brought on by the complete blockage of justice avenues, created fertile ground for exploitation. The testimony recounts the family's ongoing attempts to obtain any information about Saleh's fate, including turning to unofficial intermediaries who claimed to have connections with security agencies and demanded large sums of money, only for the family to later realise they had fallen victim to a systematic scam that preyed on their desperate need for answers:⁸⁰

"In 2019 and 2020, some people suggested we contact certain intermediaries who supposedly had strong ties to the military. They were like the 'Peshmerga'. They're official informants who work with the army, civilians who cooperate with the armed forces to combat terrorism. Anyway, they asked us to pay 50,000 pounds and promised they would get Saleh out. We dealt with several intermediaries like this, but in one case they asked for 50,000, and we paid part of it because they said Saleh would be released, but they did nothing. When it came to money, we were like drowning people clutching at straws; anyone who told us they could help, we would pay. This is our son. Whether it's a general or an officer, we'd pay. But then they stopped responding. Later, the guy told us he couldn't do anything, that he wasn't able to pull it off, and that he'd spent the money on 'expenses.' In the end, it was just a scam."

⁸⁰ Telephone interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. March 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



According to the testimony of a relative of **Lotfi Salem Mahmoud Ahmed**, who has been forcibly disappeared since April 2014:⁸¹

“A lawyer in Arish told me he was being held by National Security and asked for 50,000 pounds to get him out. I gave him 5,000, and later found out he was a fraud.”

Such exploitation is intensified by the harsh economic conditions faced by most families, which often prevent them from continuing the search or accessing legal assistance. As a relative of **Yehia Eid Alyan**, disappeared since 2015, stated:⁸²

“Some people asked us for money in exchange for telling us where Yehia was, but our financial situation is difficult. They were prominent lawyers.”

In another testimony, a relative of **Suleiman Abdel Shafi Ahmed**, disappeared since 2017, said:⁸³

“We received phone calls from people who didn’t give their names. They would give us information about him and drop vague hints. They asked for money, promising we’d hear his voice, but we never heard anything.”

Similarly, in the case of **Mohamed Sayed Ahmed Salem**, who disappeared in November 2016, a relative said:⁸⁴

“We paid a middleman to find out where he was. After taking the money, he told us Mohamed was in the Agroud military prison in Suez.”

According to the testimony of a relative of **Ayman Abdel Hamid Ibrahim Hussein Ayoub**, who has been forcibly disappeared since May 2, 2015:⁸⁵

“Ayman is an agricultural engineer and also ran a small workshop next to his job. He’s married and has four children. One day, a security campaign, I don’t even know if it was the army or the police, was going around the street and detaining anyone named Ayman. It seemed like they only had the name and nothing else. A neighbor pointed them to our house. That same day, they took around five people named Ayman from the street. All of them were released after four days, except him.”

⁸¹ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims or enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. October 2023, North Sinai, Egypt

⁸² Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims or enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. August 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

⁸³ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims or enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. August 2021, North Sinai, Egypt

⁸⁴ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims or enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. December 2021, North Sinai, Egypt

⁸⁵ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims or enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. July 2021, North Sinai, Egypt



Since then, we haven't heard a single thing about him. I asked in every police station and even traveled to Ismailia. I paid bribes and hired lawyers. I started going around asking people who had been detained and released: 'Have you heard his name?' All I want is to know if he is alive or if they executed him. None of us are involved in politics, we don't know anything about it. Ayman was never politically active. I only started caring about politics after he was taken, just to follow news about people who reappear, or those who are killed. We even have police officers in our extended family, but they refuse to intervene or even ask about him. And every time his wife or kids try to ask them for help, they say: 'It's better for you not to ask about him at all.'

According to the testimony of a relative of **Yasser Mohamed Salman Suleiman**, who has been forcibly disappeared since February 2018:⁸⁶

"We contacted a lawyer, but he was probably a scammer. Everything he told me was a lie. He said Yasser was being held in Ismailia, that he had sent him clothes, and then he asked us for money. But honestly, we don't even have the means to pay him; my husband's father is already detained in another case, and life is really hard. I kept telling him I'd try to manage things and sort something out. In the end, he just left me in a really bad emotional state, because everything he said was lie after lie. He'd keep contradicting himself, forgetting what he told me before. And in the end, he did nothing at all."

According to the testimony of a relative of **Ayoub Suleiman Eid Ouda**⁸⁷, 25 years old, who has been forcibly disappeared since September 2019, several lawyers contacted the family immediately following his arrest. They demanded large sums of money in exchange for promises to secure his release, claiming it was "just a routine inquiry" and "wouldn't take long." As time passed, the lawyer backtracked on his claim of being able to locate Ayoub, stating that he was unable to determine the detainee's whereabouts. The family stated that they paid the requested sums without receiving any receipts or legal guarantees, driven by urgency and intense anxiety over their son's fate.



⁸⁶ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. March 2024, North Sinai, Egypt

⁸⁷ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. January 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



They also noted that some of those who reached out to them advised that an intermediary was necessary to secure the detainee's release, as formal legal channels alone would not be effective. Ultimately, the family fell victim to a scam: it became clear that the situation was beyond the control of those they had engaged with, and they were abandoned after being financially drained, with no results or reliable information about their son's fate.

These testimonies reflect a recurring pattern of psychological and financial exploitation faced by the families of the disappeared, adding yet another layer of suffering to the anguish of not knowing the fate of their loved ones.

Section 3: The Disappearance of Entire Families or the Use of Relatives as Hostages to Pressure Security Targets

"When I got to the Arish First Police Station, everyone there had been arrested because someone in their family was wanted by security, either a husband, son, or brother. Some of them even had relatives who were already detained, but of course, the authorities wouldn't acknowledge it, like in my case. They take us as hostages to pressure the wanted person into turning themselves in. What I later understood is that the detainees are sometimes held by the military and others by the Ministry of Interior, but there's no coordination between the two, so the women remain held as hostages in prison until it's proven that their relative is indeed already in custody."

Testimony from a relative of a forcibly disappeared person.

Among the recurring patterns documented by Sinai Foundation for Human Rights in cases of enforced disappearance in North Sinai is a deeply troubling one: the targeting of entire families. Security forces, whether affiliated with the army or the police, often resort to forcibly disappearing multiple members of a single family or detaining some of them as hostages. This is done either to pressure a wanted relative into surrendering, as a form of collective punishment or revenge, or as part of a broader policy of suspicion when authorities believe that a family member is affiliated with an armed group. Even in cases where the wanted individual is already in custody, other family members may be detained as a precautionary measure.

The use of relatives of wanted individuals as bargaining chips or hostages constitutes a blatant violation of international human rights law and a severe breach of basic legal and humanitarian principles. The impact of such abuses extends far beyond the individuals directly targeted; it deepens the suffering of their families, who often face social exclusion, forced displacement, and severe deterioration in their economic and living conditions.



Eid Alyan Salem Suleiman and His Four Sons⁸⁸

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights documented one of the most telling cases of this pattern, through the testimony of a relative of Eid Alyan Salem, aged 52. Five members of the family were subjected to enforced disappearance over the course of four years, despite the absence of any court rulings or formal charges against them. The ordeal began with the arrest of **Yahya**, 18, in November 2015, followed by the arrests of his brothers **Abdelrahman**, 23, and **Younes**, 19. Eventually, the father, **Eid**, 52, and his son **Ayyoub**, 17, were also arrested in September 2019, after a phone call from an officer in the army battalion stationed in Qusayma, Central Sinai. Since then, the family has been unable to learn the fate of most of them, despite repeated efforts through both official and unofficial channels. No confirmed information has been received as of the time of this report.

“We’re from Central Sinai, living in the Qusayma area of Al-Hasanah city. In November 2015, Yahya was 18 years and 7 months old, and he was at home when there was a security raid in the area, and they entered our house and nearby homes. Only Yahya, his sister, and their mother were at home. He was the only male present. They weren’t asking for anyone in particular; they didn’t ask for names. Yahya asked them who they wanted; they asked his name and told him to come with them. He told his sister “I’ll be back in five minutes,” and they took him away on foot, without a vehicle. They took him to a military camp belonging to the Third Army, close to our home. The last thing we heard about him was in 2017, that he was in Al-Galaa Prison in Ismailia. He sent us regards through someone who was released from there. We didn’t file any complaints out of fear for his brothers.

On 17 July 2017, Abdelrahman was 23 years old. He was walking in the village when a military patrol stopped him, asked for his ID, and took him to the Qusayma camp. He was held there for two days, then we learned from someone that he was moved to Al-Galaa Prison. We went to inquire and were told he was there. We kept sending visits and clothes, but we never saw him. The guard used to take the items at the gate. He remained there until October 1, 2017. After that, he was transferred to an unknown location, and we haven’t heard about him since.

On 10 April 2018, Younes was 19 years old when someone from the Qusayma battalion called him. They told him to come to the battalion. He went, stayed for a few days, then was moved to Al-Zarafa Prison. Someone who was released told us

⁸⁸ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. August 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



Younes was there for two months and in June, around 1 a.m., they blindfolded him and took him to an unknown place. Since then, we haven't known anything about him.

On September 5, 2019, an officer from the Qusayma battalion called their father and said they wanted him and his son Ayyoub. Ayyoub was 17 at the time. They said military intelligence wanted them. Two days later, an army vehicle came and called for them, and they went along. Since then, we haven't heard anything about them. The last time we heard anything was 15 days later, they were reportedly in Al-Azouly Prison. We filed complaints in many places, including Al-Waseem Association and the National Council for Human Rights. They took our phone numbers and ID card copies, but no one ever responded to us."

Sayyed Ahmed Salem Sayyed and his Four Sons⁸⁹



Through the testimony of a family member, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights documented a blatant case of an entire family being targeted. The father and his four sons were subjected to arrest and enforced disappearance in successive stages between 2016 and 2017, without judicial warrants or formal charges, merely because the family was under “general suspicion” in the eyes of security

forces. The violations were not limited to the male family members but later extended to the women in the family, as some were briefly detained after being stopped at military checkpoints. The following testimony reveals the extent of violations inflicted upon the family, starting with house raids, intimidation, and detention, through prolonged enforced disappearance, and leading to community-level harassment and persecution, and the denial of any legal rights or communication with the outside world for five family members, despite the many years that have passed since their arrest by military forces:

⁸⁹ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims or enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. December 2021, North Sinai, Egypt



“On 07 November 2016, at 8 in the morning, a massive military raid arrived in the city of Nekhel. They already had Ibrahim with them, whom they had taken from the chicken shop at the entrance of the town. There were nine armored vehicles and a prisoner transport truck. They were armed, wearing the military uniforms we know, and they broke the door down and entered. Then they took the elder Sayed Ahmed Salem, 64 years old, along with his sons Badr, 26, and Ibrahim. They took them immediately without saying a word. We told them: have some mercy, the old man is sick and has diabetes and high blood pressure, let him go. They said, “Don’t worry, it’s just two days of investigation and they’ll be released.” They searched the house in a reckless and chaotic way, throwing things around as if they didn’t know what they were even looking for. They didn’t ask about anyone else. They just took all the men present and left. They also took the car and the motorcycle from in front of the house. They blindfolded them, put the old man in an armored vehicle and the sons in the prisoner transport truck, and drove off immediately. We had no idea where they were taken.

That night, Badr called his brother Ahmed on the phone and said, “We’re fine, don’t worry about us.” That was the last time we ever heard Badr’s voice. Two days later, on November 9th, they came again at midnight. They took Mohamed, 28, and Ahmed, 34, from their homes. This time, it was two police cars from Nekhel Police Station, and the officers were in official police uniforms. Among them were police officers we recognised because they lived in our neighborhood. When we asked them why they were taking them, saying: “Isn’t it enough that you already took the others?” They said, “Orders, we swear. There’s nothing we can do.” So we asked, “Orders from who?” But no one gave us any answers. The next morning, they released Ibrahim and he came back home. We asked him where he had been and where his father and brother were. He said they were in Al-Naqab Prison, and that a military vehicle brought him and dropped him off on the international road near Nekhel. He also said he hadn’t seen his brothers Mohamed or Ahmed. He said: “They put me, my father, and Badr in one room, then took us one by one for questioning. The questions were basic, all about our daily life, where we work, what we do, and so on.” After that, we spent a long time not knowing anything about them. We sent telegrams to the Public Prosecutor, the Presidency, and the Head of the Military Prosecution. After some time, the elderly mother went to Al-Galaa Prison in Ismailia, but they didn’t let her in from the gate. Mohamed’s story is something else. Mohamed’s wife passed away and left him with two daughters. Two weeks after her death, he was arrested while passing through a checkpoint. He remained detained for forty days. Then he was released, stayed outside for four days, and was arrested again on the same day. They took him and Ahmed. As for



Badr, he had been married for just three months. He has never seen his son to this day, because the child was born after his arrest.

Yasser was 40 years old. After his father and brothers were taken, he left the area for a year. Then he returned for a visit and stayed at his house for 20 days, until suddenly a military force raided the house and took him in February 2017. The first news we received about him was that he had been executed. Later, some people told us that he was alive and being held in Battalion 101 in Arish. The elderly mother and her daughter were taken in Ramadan 2020 at a checkpoint in El-Midan while visiting family in Bir al-Abd. They were told that the reason was because her sons were wanted by security and their names were flagged at checkpoints. They said to them, "We just need a quick word with you," and pulled them aside. Then an armored vehicle arrived. They were blindfolded and taken away, only realising upon arrival that they were in Battalion 101 in Arish. They were put in a filthy cell and asked for a broom so they could clean it enough to sit in. They interrogated the daughter while she was blindfolded and asked her about her brothers. She told them her the brothers had been imprisoned for four years, yet the family knew nothing about them. The officers didn't believe that the sons were already in detention, but the officer told her: "If it turns out they really are in prison, you'll be released. But if you're lying, you'll stay." The elderly mother was waiting outside the cell for her daughter and said, "I won't leave until my daughter is released." Once it was confirmed, they were released after three days, but no information was provided about the sons. One of the most heartbreaking things was that the police threatened people not to speak to our family or deal with us during the past months. Our neighbors' behavior toward us changed because the authorities told local men: "If your wife goes to their house or talks to them, we'll arrest you."

These incidents do not only affect the disappeared individual alone, but also reflect a systematic pattern of collective punishment practiced by the authorities against their families, as if simply being related were considered a punishable offense. This constitutes a grave violation of the principle of "Individual Criminal Responsibility" which is a cornerstone of established legal justice, which states that no one should be held accountable or punished for an act they did not commit. But reality speaks a different language, where the entire family becomes a target. In addition to enduring the anguish of their loved one's disappearance, the suffering of families does not end there. What remains of their lives is slowly stripped away; mothers, wives, and sisters are left to navigate a constant state of fear and uncertainty. Those who remain outside prison walls often face relentless harassment, not only for having a detained relative, but even for seeking information about them.



Section 4: Ongoing Psychological and Economic Suffering

“We’re dying. I can’t bear this anymore. I have the right to see him. I raised him, watched him grow, and got him into university. I dreamed of him becoming an engineer, and all of that is gone. I can’t forget him. I raised him just for them to take him away like that? He was living in Cairo. He only came to Arish to attend a funeral. If only he hadn’t come. He never stayed in Arish, and I don’t understand why they’re hiding him. His grandmother died wishing she could see him. And all I want is to see him.”

Testimony of the mother of a man forcibly disappeared since December 2017

The experience of having a loved one detained is one of the most painful ordeals a family can endure, but the suffering deepens immeasurably when there is no word, no confirmation, no trace of where that person is or what has happened to them. How does life go on when absence becomes a riddle, and the silence an unending echo? How do children, mothers, wives and entire families endure long, open-ended years of waiting and hoping? At some point, the families’ greatest wish becomes simply to see the disappeared again — even if behind bars, even in chains — just to know they are alive. As one family member said: *“We just want to know, is he dead or alive?”* These are the words of the family of **Ahmed Hamad Mohamed Selim**, who was arrested from his home in the village of Gelbanah in North Sinai by army forces in July 2015. He was 44 years old at the time, and has not been heard from since. A father of four daughters and a son, Ahmed left behind a family that has been waiting for more than nine years, asking the same painful question every single day: Is he still alive?

Based on several interviews conducted with the families of victims who have remained forcibly disappeared for many years, one recurring question persists: Haven’t all these years of absence been enough? Some relatives have begun questioning why the authorities continue to conceal the whereabouts of their loved ones, especially in light of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s public declaration that the war on terrorism has come to an end. The father of one victim, forcibly disappeared since June 2019, said:⁹⁰

“I just want to know where my son is, even if he’s being harmed. His mother, may God help her, dies a little more every day. She doesn’t fall asleep without crying. Four years. Isn’t that enough? The war on terror is over. And if my son did something wrong, let him be held accountable, I don’t have a problem with that. But on a human level, the very least I deserve is to know whether my son is alive or dead. Tell me where my son is if he’s alive, and if he’s dead, tell me where his grave

⁹⁰ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. January 2023, North Sinai, Egypt



is. That's all I'm asking. I don't even want him released, I just want to know where he is."

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights also spoke with a relative of **Mohamed Suleiman Eid Fayad**, a 34-year-old man who was arrested on 25 October 2015, while returning to the city of Arish from his workplace in Nuweiba, where he had been working to support his family. He had taken time off to visit his sick mother. According to the testimony, he was detained as part of a large-scale security campaign that targeted dozens of local residents, without any judicial warrant or stated reason. Since that day, his whereabouts have remained unknown, and the family continues their search amid severe psychological and economic hardship.⁹¹

"He owned a gas station in Nuweiba. He came home on leave to visit his mother, who was sick. Just as he was getting into a car in front of the house, a campaign arrived in the area and detained more than 200 people from the street. May God hold them accountable. I swear none of them had done anything wrong. Our hearts are broken. We're exhausted. The war on terror is over now; they should release the people. Living conditions are already miserable. At the very least, let us find some joy in their release. Forgive my frustration, but I'm at my limit. I've lost hope in everything. Mentally, I'm barely holding on. I've been supporting six households for over eight years. The burden has broken my back. I can't take it anymore."

The impact of enforced disappearance extends far beyond the physical absence of the individual. It leaves behind a crushing economic void, especially for vulnerable families when the disappeared is the sole breadwinner. In one interview, a relative of five forcibly disappeared male members of the **Sayed Ahmed Salem Sayed** family shared how the mother was left to support four households on her own, following the disappearance of her husband as well. The enforced absence of a provider causes not only emotional suffering, but also a cascading economic collapse inherited by women and children:⁹²

"After her sons and husband disappeared, the mother had to bear the weight of everything. She started baking bread for people to earn money, and selling date paste just to provide for the children. She now supports four families: Her own household and her daughters, Her son Ahmed's family, which includes his wife and three children, Her son Mohamed's family, where only his two daughters remain as their mother died about 50 days before Mohamed was taken, And her son Badr's family, which includes his wife and the son he never met; the boy was born after

⁹¹ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. October 2023, North Sinai, Egypt

⁹² Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. December 2021, North Sinai, Egypt



Badr was arrested. On top of that, two of her daughters live with her, one of them with her own children after her husband passed away.

Things became incredibly difficult after all the men were taken. Ahmed used to work for the water company. After his arrest, we sent telegrams to his workplace asking them to pay at least half his salary, so his wife and children could survive. But they refused, saying they needed official proof that he was in custody. And of course, we have no idea where he even is, so how could we get that?"

Enforced disappearance leaves behind a void filled only with pain, and a scar that remains etched in the bodies and hearts of those left waiting. A relative of **Hossam Shubeib Oudah Mohamed**, 22 years old, recalls how his disappearance on 19 January 2019, after being arrested from his home, triggered a series of escalating hardships for the family, culminating in his mother losing her eyesight, followed by severe health complications that eventually led to the amputation of her leg. Even after more than six years, the family has received no official information about his fate. They remain trapped in a cycle of pain and endless searching, without even the smallest glimmer of hope, with only one recurring question: Is Hossam still alive?⁹³

"I just want to talk to someone who will listen and help us. We've been suffering since the day my brother disappeared. The army took him from our home six years ago, and we've been searching everywhere since then. My mother lost her sight from crying so much. Her diabetes worsened, and she had to have her leg amputated. She can't walk anymore, all from her grief over my brother. I hope our voice reaches someone. Maybe, just maybe, some good can come of it with your help. Maybe we'll find out if my brother is dead or alive, or where he is. It's been six years. We know nothing. Our hearts are burned from the pain. Since the day he was taken, my mother and all of us have been to everyone we could think of, even the Presidency. They wouldn't receive her. We've been scammed multiple times while clinging to false hope. He was taken from Qatia village, along with two other young men. They were held at Fourth Battalion. The others were eventually released, but he never came back."

Ammar's mother, whose 17-year-old son was disappeared on 26 February 2018, concludes with words that encapsulate the agony of families who don't know whether their loved ones are alive or dead:⁹⁴

⁹³ Personal interview with an eyewitness and survivor of enforced disappearance. The name of the witness has been withheld upon request. January 2022, North Sinai, Egypt

⁹⁴ Personal interview with the mother of a forcibly disappeared person. A pseudonym has been used to protect the witness's safety. March 2024, North Sinai, Egypt



“I only ask God to bring him back to us, and for you to help me if there’s anything you can do, I just want some reassurance. It’s been seven years. Even if, God forbid, he died, I just want to know and move on. I mean, I just want to reach some closure about what happened. I would grieve and cry if he died, but at least the matter would be closed. But to keep searching endlessly, not knowing whether he’s alive or dead; that’s what’s breaking my heart and making it impossible to live or find peace in God’s decree. I once visited someone who had been released from prison and asked him about Yasser. He told me no one remained alive in Arish Central Prison after 2022, especially if they had relatives affiliated with extremist groups. When I asked if he was sure, he said he wasn’t certain about my son’s case in particular. Honestly, if he had told me with certainty that my son had been executed, maybe I would have found more peace than I do now.”

Among the testimonies documented by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights is that of the family of **Adly Ghethyan Ajmiyan Eid**, a 27-year-old man who was arrested on 07 September 2015, from the village of Abu Shanar in Rafah, and has not been seen since. His family’s account highlights the deep suffering endured by the relatives of forcibly disappeared individuals. Adly’s mother’s health has deteriorated significantly. She now suffers from chronic illnesses brought on by the trauma and grief. The family continues to plead for information, clinging to the only hope they have left: to know the fate of their missing son. They insist he had no political or criminal affiliations, a fact echoed by all who knew him in their village:⁹⁵

“I swear to God, he wasn’t involved in anything; he didn’t even pray. We searched for him everywhere and still know nothing to this day. Please, we beg you, help us. His mother now suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart problems. Please, for the love of God, help us find out where he is. I swear, he had no political or criminal ties, none at all. Ask anyone in our village; they’ll tell you the same”

The testimony of the family of a man who has been forcibly disappeared since his arrest on 15 October 2015, at the age of 35, sheds light on the profound emotional and financial toll that enforced disappearance inflicts on families. He was taken by the army from his home in Sheikh Zuweid, and has not been seen since:⁹⁶

“I didn’t have the heart to tell my family what I heard, it would only kill them with worry. My brother has two kids, one in primary and one in middle school, and a wife. It’s a tragedy every day just seeing them, taking care of their needs... It breaks my heart. I just want one day to bring them good news, anything at all. Every now

⁹⁵ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. April 2022, North Sinai, Egypt

⁹⁶ Personal interview with a relative of one of the victims of enforced disappearance. The identity of the witness has been withheld upon their request. May 2025, North Sinai, Egypt

Cast Into the Abyss

Untold stories of civilians swallowed by
secret detention centres in Sinai



and then my mother asks, 'Any news about your brother?' I turn my face away as tears fall from my eyes so she doesn't see, and I just tell her: 'God willing, relief is near.'

After they said he was taken to the battalion, he was never seen again. Not in Al-Azouly prison, not at the National Security headquarters, not even inside the battalion. Every time someone is released, we go ask them. The last time anyone saw him was the same week he was arrested, inside Battalion 101. People who got out said there are two cells in there: one for random detainees, and another that's highly restricted. And anyone who enters that one... God help anyone who ends up there."



Conclusion and Recommendations

“When I entered, I weighed about 100 kilograms. When I got out and my family saw me, they broke down in tears and took me to the doctor. I weighed only 70 kilograms. I had anemia, jaundice, high blood sugar, and a slipped disc in my neck. I couldn’t even lift a water bottle to drink and could only pray while sitting in a chair...”

Testimony of a survivor of enforced disappearance.

“While we were disappeared, people who had been missing for years didn’t even know if their families were alive or dead. I mean, there were people who had been forcibly disappeared for years without any news about their loved ones, they could all have died and he wouldn’t know. And indeed, some were released only to find out their families had passed away. There was someone who was detained and, when he got out, he found out his father had died, after he had spent years thinking about him inside. It was painful for everyone on the inside...”

Testimony of a survivor of enforced disappearance.

Based on our interviews with survivors of enforced disappearance and their families, as well as monitoring of cases of enforced disappearance from 2013 until the time of writing this report, we can affirm that the phenomenon of enforced disappearance in Sinai is both widespread and systematic. It has undoubtedly affected thousands of individuals, including, by well-supported estimates, around 3,000 people whose fate remains unknown. According to testimonies, there is hardly a single family in North Sinai that has not had at least one of its members subjected to enforced disappearance, followed by torture and complete isolation from the outside world for varying periods, ranging from days and months to more than ten years in some cases.

While enforced disappearance amounts to a crime against humanity under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, given that it encompasses multiple human rights violations, including torture, detention in unofficial facilities, and arbitrary arrest, the state continues to deny and deflect responsibility. Egypt has also not ratified the International Convention on Enforced Disappearance. Meanwhile, families of the disappeared continue to endure immense social and economic hardship, as well as profound psychological suffering throughout the course of their search, often facing ongoing threats and intimidation as a result of their efforts.



Therefore, the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights calls for the following:

At the legislative level:

- Egypt should sign the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- The definition of "torture" in the Penal Code (Articles 126 and 129) should be amended to align with the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Egypt should sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), which would allow for independent organisations to conduct field visits to detention facilities

At the Policy Level:

- Shut down all unofficial detention facilities, release all individuals held arbitrarily and unlawfully, and allow all detainees to have regular contact with their families and legal counsel
- Establish an independent committee composed of judges, legal experts, human rights activists, and representatives from tribal and local communities in Sinai. This committee should be granted full authority to investigate and compile a comprehensive list of all forcibly disappeared persons and determine their fate. It must also be empowered to award compensation to victims of enforced disappearance and their families, in accordance with the severity of the physical, emotional, and economic harm they have endured. Adequate budgets must be allocated for this purpose.
- Activate the role of the National Council for Human Rights in supporting and advocating for the families of the forcibly disappeared who have submitted complaints to the council. The council should go beyond merely relaying responses from the Ministry of Interior to the families; it must follow up on cases, document associated human rights violations, demand reparations, and seek accountability for those responsible.
- Establish a body under the Public Prosecutor's office to receive and investigate reports of enforced disappearance across Egypt, in coordination with the independent investigative committee. This body should also oversee all detention facilities, ensure the closure of unlawful sites, and investigate all cases of unofficial detention.



Annexes:

Annex 1: Letter addressed to the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Interior, the President of the State Information Service, and the President of the National Council for Human Rights

Addressees:

- Minister of Defense of the Arab Republic of Egypt
- Minister of Interior of the Arab Republic of Egypt
- Head of the State Information Service
- President of the National Council for Human Rights

25 June 2025

Your Excellencies,

As part of the work of the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights in monitoring and documenting human rights violations in North Sinai from 2013 to 2025, and based on the Foundation's commitment to professional and objective research standards, and in line with human rights work principles that require including official viewpoints in its reports, we address you today in your official capacity to inquire about the serious and repeated violations we have documented regarding the crimes of enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and poor detention conditions in North Sinai over the past ten years.

The Foundation has documented, based on dozens of direct testimonies collected from victims' families and survivors of enforced disappearance, systematic patterns of unlawful detention and torture, often affecting entire families. This includes numerous cases of children who were arbitrarily arrested and subjected to enforced disappearance, without consideration for the safeguards for children stipulated in the Egyptian Constitution, national law, and international conventions ratified by Egypt.

In this context, we present the following questions and kindly request an official response so that the Foundation may include the government's viewpoint in the report scheduled for publication soon:

1. Do your competent authorities have an official count of the number of citizens who remain under enforced disappearance in North Sinai? What is the state's position on revealing their fate?
2. Through the field research conducted by the Foundation, we have reviewed dozens of official telegrams sent by families of the disappeared to relevant state institutions. The families reported receiving no responses or information regarding their loved ones' fate.



How do the concerned authorities explain the complete lack of official responses to these telegrams, despite the obligations under Egyptian law to investigate reports of enforced disappearance?

3. What is the fate of the two children, Abdelrahman Ibrahim Suleiman Zurei and Shadi Sami Suleiman Zurei, aged 13 and 16 at the time of their arrest on August 23, 2018? A week after their arrest, they were brought before the prosecution, which ordered their release on November 16, 2019. However, the release order was not executed, and the two children were subjected to enforced disappearance for 11 months. They were later charged in a new case. The prosecution ordered their release again on December 12, 2020, but they were subjected to enforced disappearance for the third consecutive time, this time for six months. They were brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution on June 10, 2021, in case no. 620 of 2021, and charged with: joining a terrorist group and financing and supporting that group. These charges were identical to the previous two cases for which they had already been ordered released. They were released for the third time in October 2022, after a total enforced disappearance of 3 years and 7 months (46 months). Their family continues to ask: what is the fate of the two boys, seven years after their arrest?
4. What is the fate of student Ahmed Mohamed Hamza Mohamed Hamza, who was 21 years old at the time of his arrest on September 23, 2024? His family has received no information about him since his arrest, despite sending several telegrams to the concerned authorities without receiving any response clarifying his legal status or current place of detention.
5. How do the relevant authorities explain the continued phenomenon of arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance in North Sinai, amid repeated denials of the presence of detainees in several unofficial prisons such as Al-Azouli Military Prison, Battalion 101, Al-Zarafa Military Prison, and Ajroud Military Prison, all of which, according to numerous testimonies, continue to be used as secret detention centers beyond judicial oversight? What steps have Egyptian authorities taken to address these violations and ensure compliance with national laws and Egypt's international obligations in this regard?

We look forward to your kind response at the earliest opportunity, so that it can be included in the report currently being prepared, in the interest of transparency and the right to know the truth.

With sincere regards,

**SINAI FOUNDATION
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**