

Patrice Motsepe
President of the Confederation of African Football
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Egypt

Copied to:
Federico Addiechi, Head of Sustainability, FIFA

25 June 2024

RE: MASS ARREST OF EGYPTIAN FANS, INCLUDING CHILDREN, FOR GAZA SOLIDARITY

Dear Mr Motsepe,

We are writing to you to express our concerns at the treatment of approximately 250 Egyptian football fans, including children as young as 13, who were detained by security forces after expressing solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza and displaying the Palestinian flag at a match. We request that CAF call on the Egyptian authorities to ensure any charges levelled are dropped, and to offer assurances that they will not detain any supporters expressing peaceful political opinions.

FairSquare is a non-profit organisation one of whose aims is to ensure better, more democratic governance to prevent sporting institutions and competitions contributing to harm and suffering.

At an Egyptian Premier League match between Al Ahly FC and Pharco FC at Alexandria's Army stadium on 14 June, a number of Al Ahly fans raised Palestinian flags and peacefully chanted slogans in support of Palestinians in Gaza. Many fans also left the stadium in a solidarity protest, which can be seen in [video footage](#). As fans left the match, security forces carried out detentions of approximately 250 people, the majority children aged 13 and 15, according to the [Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedom](#) (ECRF). These detainees were believed to have been transferred to the Central Security Camp in Margham, the second Amriya Police division, and to the Security Directorate. ECRF reports that by the following day the detainees had been released.

This is the latest and largest scale instance to date of Egyptian security forces carrying out arbitrary arrests of people displaying Palestinian flags. According to the ECRF, 137 individuals (including 5 children and 17 women) have been detained for expressing solidarity with Palestine since 7 October 2023. Of these, 37 have been released on bail, 17 have been released without charges, 83 remain in pre-trial detention, and 6 individuals have forcibly disappeared. The fact that this incident involves the mass arrests of football supporters for their actions during a match should be of profound concern to CAF.

CAF's [2023 Statutes](#) make clear (Article 2.4) that "CAF shall respect the human rights recognized internationally", and that (Article 2.3) "any person or organization involved in football in Africa has to



respect at all times and unreservedly” these statutes. One of CAF’s stated objectives (Article 2.1.m.i) is “the promotion of peace, solidarity, fraternity and unity among footballers, officials, and clubs; both in Africa and Worldwide”.

Under international human rights law, arrest or detention as punishment for the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedoms of opinion and expression - in this case a message of support and solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza - is arbitrary.¹ Additionally, under the [Convention of the Rights of the Child](#) (Article 37 (b)), which Egypt has ratified, the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child “shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort”.

The outright banning of Palestinian flags and pro-Palestinian sentiment in football stadiums, which has been imposed in stadiums in Egypt as well as other countries, is a clear violation of the right to freedom of expression. In November 2023, [UN experts expressed](#) concern at attacks, reprisals, criminalisation and sanctions against those who publicly criticise the Israeli government’s policies or express solidarity with victims of grave human rights violations and demand justice. In their statement they specifically referenced the importance of free expression in the context of sport: “Sport is ... about building bridges and enabling all people to meet and engage, while respecting diversity of origin and opinions, which every human being has the right to hold”. Under international human rights law, any restriction on human rights must meet the conditions of legality, necessity and proportionality: specifically, any restrictions on peaceful protest must be [content-neutral](#), and not related to the message conveyed by the protest.

We note that when Palestinian flags were confiscated at [AFCON matches](#) in Côte d’Ivoire earlier this year, a CAF spokesperson told media that the organisation had not been aware of this practice and that CAF would be investigating.

In addition to publicly calling on all on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that none of those detained are charged or prosecuted, and to offer assurances that they will not detain any supporters expressing peaceful political opinions, we would urge you to make clear to the Egyptian authorities that, under the CAF statutes (Article 7.1.g), there can be serious ramifications for Egyptian football if they interfere politically in its affairs.

Yours sincerely,



James Lynch
Director



Nicholas McGeehan
Director

¹ UN Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 35 (2014), paras. 12 and 17.

