

## Media Release

### **Global award penetrates Egyptian prison walls**

*Journalist Khaled Elbalshy announced as Individual Activist Category Winner of the 2017 Nelson Mandela-Graça Machel Innovation Awards*

What does it take to boldly and relentlessly champion the cause of free speech, despite judicial and online harassment, in a country where media freedom is under constant attack?

That's a question best answered by Khaled Elbalshy, an Egyptian journalist and activist, who has been named winner of the coveted Nelson Mandela-Graça Machel Innovation Awards for 2017 in the Individual Activist category.

Elbalshy was selected from some 300 nominations from across the globe. He will be honored at a ceremony on 7 December in Suva, Fiji as part of International Civil Society Week.

For the first time this year, the Awards have been run in collaboration with The Elders – a group of independent leaders working together for peace, justice and human rights, founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007. Specifically, the Awards form part of the #WalkTogether campaign, catalysed by The Elders with civil society partner networks. #WalkTogether seeks to celebrate 'sparks of hope' like the Award winners, who are inspiring hope, compassion and empathy at a time when the dark forces of fear, xenophobia and hate speech represent a profound threat to global freedoms and unity.

Mary Robinson, member of The Elders and former President of Ireland, commended Mr. Elbalshy on his work. "Many powerful changes begin with the vision of one courageous individual. We celebrate Khaled's courage and want him to know that The Elders are walking together with him."

On hearing the news of his win, Mr. Elbalshy was characteristically humble: "This Award is a powerful recognition of all who are defending freedom of the press in Egypt. It is also a message to the more than 20 imprisoned journalists that their voices are still able to penetrate even the walls of prison."

The Awards recognise outstanding efforts in four categories: Youth Activist, Individual Activist, Civil Society Organisation and Brave Philanthropy.

Elbalshy is an Egyptian human rights defender, journalist, and chief editor of the Al Badaiah online newspaper. He established the Front to Defend Journalists and Freedoms, which has succeeded in having several journalists released from detention. He has also sought every available platform to shine a light on violations by the government and share these with the world, and has actively mentored younger journalists to defend their own rights and the rights of others.

"I continue because I believe it is the right of all Egyptians to have a press that reflects their aspirations for justice and freedom. The pressures faced by human rights defenders like myself are a small price to pay in the pursuit of this goal", Mr. Elbalshy explained.

Other winners include a young Guyanese change-maker, a Nigerian NGO promoting mental health awareness, and a German-based philanthropic organisation.

The Nelson Mandela-Graça Machel Innovation Awards are led by global civil society alliance, CIVICUS, through the Civic Space Initiative. Together with CIVICUS' [SPEAK!](#) campaign, the Awards seek to celebrate, promote, and defend the voices of ordinary citizens in ensuring a more just and sustainable future for all.

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