

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 19, 2020

President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi
Arab Republic of Egypt
Cairo, Egypt

Dear President Al-Sisi:

We write to strongly urge you to immediately release human rights defenders, lawyers, political activists, and other prisoners of conscience in Egypt before their wrongful imprisonment becomes a death sentence due to the coronavirus pandemic.

We are troubled that political activist Ramy Shaath has been held for more than a year in pre-trial detention, and that former parliamentarian Zyad el Elaimy and others detained per case no. 930 of 2019 are imprisoned for seeking to exercise their right to peaceful political participation.

We note the continued arbitrary detention of activist Alaa Abdel Fattah and his sister Sanaa Seif, detained since June 2020 on unfounded charges. Ms. Seif was taken by plainclothes security forces in front of the Public Prosecutor's office when she and her family attempted to lodge a complaint about an assault the family reportedly suffered in front of Tora prison, as they waited to receive a letter from her brother. Human rights lawyers Mohamed el Baqer, Mahienour el Massry, and Haitham Mohamedeen, former party leader Khaled Dawoud, researchers Ibrahim Ezz-Eldin, Patrick George Zaki, Hazem Hosny, journalists Esraa Abdel Fattah, Solafa Magdy, Hossam al-Sayyad, Mustafa Al-Khateeb and Mahmoud Hussein, and Ramy Kamel, a Coptic Christian activist, are all behind bars. These are only a few of the many prisoners of conscience facing life-threatening health risks in Egyptian prisons.

American citizens and individuals with strong ties to the United States have also been unjustly imprisoned in Egypt and face increased risk due to the pandemic. We welcome your government's decision to release Reem Mohamed Desouky last May and Mohamed Amashah in July. However, Desouky's brother Nour, who was arrested when he went to visit her, remains in prison, as does dual citizen Khaled Hassan who should either be released or afforded a fair, public trial in a civilian court. Recently, several members of the extended family of former prisoner of conscience Mohamed Soltan have been arbitrarily detained in apparent retaliation for his decision to file a U.S. lawsuit against an official alleged to be responsible for his wrongful imprisonment and torture. Hostage-taking is illegal and unacceptable under any circumstances.

We were appalled by the deaths in custody this year of U.S. citizen Mustafa Kassem and filmmaker Shady Habash. Mr. Kassem, who was diabetic, died after his health deteriorated. Mr. Habash died after the prison administration delayed his transfer for outside treatment. In addition, prominent journalist Mohamed Monir, age 65, contracted COVID-19 in pre-trial detention and was released after falling ill in custody, only to die in an isolation unit at a Cairo hospital. It is clear that the extreme overcrowding, poor hygiene and lack of access to adequate health care in the Egyptian prison system endanger the health and lives of all detainees. That risk is compounded now that new reports of COVID-19 cases among prison workers and detainees have emerged.

A joint [statement](#) issued by the World Health Organization, the UNODC, the OHCHR, and UNAIDS called for the release of pre-trial detainees and prisoners with underlying health conditions in order to mitigate overcrowding in prisons. OHCHR [reiterated](#) this call directly to your government to release those held in pre-trial detention, as well as prisoners convicted of non-violent crimes. These calls follow a statement earlier this year from sixty-six French parliamentarians requesting the release of human rights defenders arbitrarily detained in Egypt.

Upholding fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined in the U.S. and Egyptian constitutions and international law is essential to the U.S.-Egyptian partnership, as well as to state-society relations that form the bedrock of legitimate and stable governance. The wrongful imprisonment of prisoners of conscience and other gross violations of human rights fundamentally undermine that partnership and those relations.

We therefore urge you to immediately and unconditionally release those prisoners whose cases we have cited, and all other prisoners of conscience unjustly detained for exercising their fundamental human rights. These are people who should never have been imprisoned in the first place. We further strongly urge you to reserve the use of pretrial detention as a measure of last resort and to cease the repeated detention of journalists, political activists, and human rights defenders, in accordance with recommendations from the United Nations and others regarding best practices for reducing life-threatening overcrowding in prisons during a pandemic. We also urge you to end reprisals against human rights defenders advocating for the release of political prisoners. This includes Bahey eldin Hassan, one of Egypt's most prominent human rights defenders, who recently received a 15-year jail sentence in absentia for his peaceful criticism of the Egyptian government.

We ask that you treat this request with the seriousness and urgency with which we make it. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
/s/ Richard J. Durbin
/s/ Christopher S. Murphy
/s/ Elizabeth Warren

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
/s/ Patrick Leahy
/s/ Bernard Sanders

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.
/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley
/s/ Chris Van Hollen

/s/ Don Beyer
/s/ Joaquin Castro
/s/ Gerald E. Connolly
/s/ Veronica Escobar
/s/ Jesús "Chuy" García
/s/ Alcee L. Hastings
/s/ Eddie Bernice Johnson
/s/ Ted Lieu
/s/ Betty McCollum
/s/ Ilhan Omar
/s/ Ayanna Pressley
/s/ Harley Rouda
/s/ Brad Sherman
/s/ David Trone
/s/ Susan Wild

/s/ Earl Blumenauer
/s/ David Cicilline
/s/ Jim Cooper
/s/ Anna G. Eshoo
/s/ Raúl M. Grijalva
/s/ Eleanor Holmes Norton
/s/ Andy Kim
/s/ Alan Lowenthal
/s/ Gregory Meeks
/s/ Chellie Pingree
/s/ David Price
/s/ Bobby L. Rush
/s/ Adam Smith
/s/ Nydia M. Velázquez

/s/ André Carson
/s/ Steve Cohen
/s/ Ted Deutch
/s/ Adriano Espaillat
/s/ Deb Haaland
/s/ Pramila Jayapal
/s/ Barbara Lee
/s/ Tom Malinowski
/s/ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
/s/ Katie Porter
/s/ Jamie Raskin
/s/ Mikie Sherrill
/s/ Rashida Tlaib
/s/ Bonnie Watson Coleman