



**Middle
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28 May 2020

His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
President, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +20-2-390-1998

Chancellor Hamada El-Sawy
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Fax: 20-2-25774716

Prime Solicitor General Khaled Diauddin
Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +20-2-26381956

Dear President al-Sisi, Chancellor El-Sawy and Prime Solicitor General
Diauddin,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America to express our deep concern regarding the detention of Kholoud Said, a translator and the head of the Translation Unit of the publication department at Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA).

MESA was founded in 1966 to support scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has almost 2500 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Kholoud Said was arrested on 21 April 2020 from her home in Alexandria, without any warrants or explanations given to her or her family. She was detained in an unknown location for one week before appearing on 28 April 2020 before the State Security Prosecutor in Cairo, where she was charged with joining a terrorist group and knowing its objectives, spreading rumors and false news, as well as using social media for these activities. The prosecutor ordered her held for 15 days in pre-trial detention. Said's detention has been extended twice since then – on 10 and 20 May – each time without a hearing or access to lawyers.

In a separate case, Marwa Arafa, a free-lance translator, was arrested from her home on 20 April 2020, one day before Kholoud Said. She appeared before the State Security Prosecutor on 4 May 2020 and was ordered to remain in detention on similar charges.

Kholoud Said's work for the BA and the library's work in general are integral to freedom of research and information. A distinguished national institution, Bibliotheca Alexandrina is known as a global library and an important cultural center. Said's responsibilities there include translating books, articles, reports, letters, conferences papers, and the library's annual reports. They also include the translation of many types of documents, including those for the library's website and databases, films, and documentaries. Detaining Said is not only

damaging to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina's reputation but beyond that, it also threatens the freedom of research in Egypt. Furthermore, Said is a researcher in anthropology. As both a translator and a researcher, she has been active in academic circles in Egypt, contributing to academic conferences and workshops. For academic freedom to flourish, the larger context of freedom of inquiry, information and speech must be respected.

Kholoud Said's initial detention and its subsequent extensions seem to follow a recent pattern whereby the Egyptian authorities treat pre-trial detention – which can last up to two years -- as a punishment for researchers, intellectuals, writers and activists. While Article 54 of the Egyptian Constitution protects personal freedom and guarantees that any limitations of this freedom be based on judicial warrant necessitated by an investigation, the article makes the legislature responsible for regulating preventive (pre-trial) detention. There is, however, a contradiction between Article 143 in Criminal Procedural Law, which stipulates that pre-trial detention should not exceed two years, and Article 380 which does not put any limit to pre-trial detentions. It thus seems that state security officers and prosecutors are exploiting the existing contradiction between these two articles so as to extend pre-trial detentions to two years or even more.

We are especially concerned about such extended detention because of developments in Egypt since the start of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In the last two months, authorities have banned all visits to prisons. All prisoners, including pre-trial detainees, have been denied access to their lawyers and do not have family visitation. Detentions have been automatically extended by prosecutors and judges without hearings. According to Amnesty International, in a three-day period (from 4-6 May 2020) the “terrorism circuit” judges at the Cairo Criminal Court extended the pre-trial detention of over [1,600 detainees](#), many of whom are prisoners of conscience. This is especially alarming in the current context when, to combat the spread of COVID-19, your government should adopt emergency measures that include [reducing prison populations](#). Instead, arrests continue and detentions are extended.

The detention of Ms. Said without a hearing is yet another example of the ongoing attacks on academic freedom, freedom of speech and access to free and fair trials. Said's arbitrary arrest and the extension of the detentions of academics and writers in Egypt is a violation of the 2014 Constitution's Article 65, concerning the freedom of speech and all means of expression and publications and Article 23, which maintains that the state grants freedom of scientific research, among other things. Although we have been pleased with the recent release of Dr. Hassan Nafaa, we urge you to release Kholoud Said, Marwa Arafa, and all other scholars and prisoners of conscience in Egypt. Additionally, we call on the Egyptian Parliament to reform the Criminal Procedural Law to end the practice of lengthy pre-trial detention.

We look forward to your response.



Re: Detained Egyptian translators
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina Rizk Khoury', with a long, sweeping underline.

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', with a stylized, cursive script.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor, University of Southern California

cc:

Dr. Mostafa el Feki, Director, Bibliotheca Alexandrina
Dr. Ali Abdel Aal, Speaker, Egyptian Parliament
Dr. Laila Hussein Moustafa, President, Middle East Librarians Association