



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
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22 February 2021

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

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

Public Prosecutor, Hamada El-Sawy  
Office of the Public Prosecutor  
Fax: +202 2577 4716  
Twitter: @EgyptJustice

Dear President al-Sisi, Prime Solicitor-General Diauddin, and Public  
Prosecutor El-Sawy:

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 arrest of Ahmed Samir Santawy. Santawy, an Egyptian national, is a second-year student in the MA Sociology/Social Anthropology program at the Central European University (CEU) in Vienna. Since his arrival in Egypt on 15 December 2020 to visit his family, he has been subjected to several interrogations by security agencies and enforced disappearance; he has endured harassments and physical abuse. He has remained in detention since 1 February 2021.

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 over 2800 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.

On 15 December, Santawy arrived in Egypt via Sharm El Sheikh International Airport. Upon his arrival, he was interrogated by state security officers, but was allowed entry. However, on 23 January 2021, while he was briefly away from his family's home in Cairo, state security officers raided the residence. Officers confiscated a digital video recorder from the home's CCTV system and requested that Santawy present himself at the police station in the New Cairo al-Tagammu' al-Awwal (First Settlement) neighborhood. While there was no warrant to justify this request, Santawy nonetheless voluntarily went on 30 January to the police station where he was supposed to present himself. He was told to return on 1 February and he did so. At this point, however, his family and friends lost contact with him. The authorities denied that he was being detained. After having no contact with him for over seventy-two hours, his family contacted the Attorney General's office demanding his release. Five days later, on 6 February, Santawy appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution. During the interrogation, his lawyers learned that he had been subjected to torture — he was slapped in the face and kicked many times — during his incommunicado detention — to force him to confess

to acts of which he was not guilty. At this 6 February session, the Supreme State Security Prosecution denied Santawy and his lawyers the right to investigate these abuses and ordered his detention for fifteen days pending further investigation of his case (No. 65 of 2021) with charges that include "joining a terrorist group with prior knowledge of its objectives, broadcasting false news aimed at disrupting security and public order, and using an account on Facebook for the purpose of spreading false news." On 17 February, Santawy's pretrial detention was renewed for fifteen days "on paper." He was not transferred from his prison cell nor brought before a prosecutor or judge for a renewal hearing, which constitutes a serious due process violation.

There is a growing consensus within international human rights circles and academic institutions and associations that Egypt has become a very dangerous place for both academic research and free expression, for Egyptian and foreign researchers alike. We have written to you repeatedly over the past several years regarding similar cases of arrests, detention, torture, and, in the tragic and dreadful case of Giulio Regeni, death of scholars and researchers at the hands of state security forces [see, among others [4 February 2016](#), [11 February 2020](#), [25 February 2020](#), [28 May 2020](#), [9 September 2020](#), [4 November 2020](#), [24 November 2020](#), [24 November 2020](#), [18 February 2021](#)].

Santawy's experience is only the most recent in the growing list of such cases of violations of freedom of expression and academic freedom targeting researchers and rights advocates in Egypt. More often than not, the unsubstantiated charges against them are similar, as is the gross mistreatment to which they are subjected. Furthermore, [reports](#) by credible international human rights and jurists' organizations in the last few years have warned that the Egyptian Judiciary has been steadily losing its credibility due to the pressure of the security apparatus and the continuous denial of proper right of defense and fair trials in general.

Santawy's detention is a violation of the 2014 Egyptian Constitution's Article 65, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom in all means of expression and publications, and of Article 23, which provides for the freedom of scientific research. We call on you to take all necessary actions to put an end to the ongoing attacks on academic freedom and freedom of speech, the repeated violations of due process, and the abuses of the independence of the judiciary in Egypt. We urge you, as well, to release Ahmed Samir Santawy from detention without delay, drop all charges against him, and allow him to return to his studies and his peaceful work.

We look forward to your response.



Re: Ahmed Samir Santawy

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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 font.

Laurie Brand

Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor, University of Southern California

cc:

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