



**Middle
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President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Arab Republic of Egypt
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Prime Solicitor-General Khaled Diauddin
Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202-2638-1956

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

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 continued detentions of Kholoud Said, a translator and the head of the Translation Unit of the publication department at Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), and free-lance translator Marwa Arafa. We wrote to you about their respective cases on [28 May 2020](#), while calling for their release. We reiterate our plea that both Said and Arafa be released from prison without further delay, and we urge you to free, as well, all other detained scholars and prisoners of conscience.

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 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.

Kholoud Said was arrested on 21 April 2020 from her home in Alexandria, without any warrants or explanations presented to her or her family. After a week-long detention, she appeared before the State Security Prosecutor in Cairo, and 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. She was held in remand detention for nearly seven months in Case 558/2020. While the Cairo Criminal Court ordered her release on 13 December 2020, she was kept in detention for weeks without explanation until she appeared before the State Security Prosecutor in Cairo on 11 January 2021. She was ordered back in remand detention in conjunction with a new case (1017/2020), in which she faced new charges similar to those leveled against her previously. She remains in remand detention until today. Like many prisoners of conscience in Egypt, Ms. Said is a victim of the practice of rotation, whereby authorities level baseless charges against detained individuals in order to circumvent court- or legally- mandated release orders and hold prisoners indefinitely. The practice of rotation is widely recognized

as inhumane and an example of arbitrary detention in violation of Egyptian and [international](#) laws.

In a separate case, Marwa Arafa was arrested from her home on 20 April 2020. She appeared before the State Security Prosecutor on 4 May 2020 and was ordered to remain in remand detention on similar charges in conjunction with [Case 570/2020](#). Ms. Arafa's remand detention has been renewed multiple times over the course of the past year, most recently on 30 March 2021. Moreover, according to the Egyptian Network for Human Rights, Ms. Arafa has faced mistreatment in prison, and, in February, was forced to sleep on the cold floor without access to personal hygiene items. It has been reported that her two-year old daughter is experiencing extreme health challenges in the absence of her mother's care.

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 it also threatens the freedom of research in Egypt. Furthermore, as both a translator and a researcher in Anthropology, Said has been active in academic circles in Egypt, contributing to 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 time limit on pre-trial detention. 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 family visitation and access to their lawyers. Furthermore, 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 more than [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, especially during the ongoing third wave of the virus spread in Egypt, your government should adopt emergency measures that include reducing prison populations. Instead, arrests continue and detentions are extended.

The detentions of Kholoud Said and Marwa Arafa without a hearing are yet another example of the ongoing attacks on academic freedom, freedom of speech and access to free and fair trials. Their arbitrary arrests and the extension of the detentions of academics and writers in Egypt are violations 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. While we note the release of multiple political prisoners over the course of the past month, 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. Finally, we hope to see the government take meaningful steps toward improving the state of academic freedom in the country in accordance with the “[First Seven Steps Statement](#)” Egyptian human rights organizations released in May 2021.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University



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

cc:

Dr. Mostafa el Feki, Director, Bibliotheca Alexandrina
Dr. Hanafi Gebali, Speaker, Egyptian Parliament
Dr. Laila Hussein Moustafa, President, Middle East Librarians Association
Motaz Zahran, Ambassador, Embassy of Egypt, Washington, D.C.
Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations



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The Honorable Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer for the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament

Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Irene Khan, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Joey Hood, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State, United States Government

Philip McDaniel, Foreign Policy Advisor: Congressman Tom Malinowski (NJ-7), Member of Egypt Human Rights Caucus

Nancy Chen, Legislative Fellow: Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA), Member of Egypt Human Rights Caucus