



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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10 February 2022

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 great concern regarding the nearly two year-long detentions of Kholoud Said, a translator and the head of the Translation Unit of the publication department at Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), and freelance translator Marwa Arafa. We wrote to you about their respective cases on [6 May 2021](#) and [28 May 2020](#), while calling for their release. We repeat our call for their immediate release and urge you to take steps to end the detention of all 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 has been in detention since her arrest at her home in Alexandria on 21 April 2020. She was charged with joining a terrorist group and spreading false news (Case 558/2020), allegations that have no basis. Despite a 13 December 2020 court order stipulating her release, her detention has continued and, in January 2021, the state leveled new charges against her (Case 1017/2020), similar to those she faced in Case 558/2020. She remains in remand detention, which the Cairo Criminal Court renewed on 26 January 2022. As we noted in our letter dated [6 May 2021](#), Ms. Said is a victim of the inhumane 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.

In a separate case, Marwa Arafa was arrested from her home on 20 April 2020. Since 4 May 2020, she has remained in detention on the baseless charge of joining a terrorist organization ([Case 570/2020](#)). Her detention has been renewed multiple times, most recently on 6 February 2022. According to the



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Egyptian Network for Human Rights, Ms. Arafa has faced mistreatment in prison.

The detentions of Kholoud Said and Marwa Arafa exemplify the serious deterioration of academic freedom in the country (see our letter dated [15 June 2021](#)), despite government proclamations pledging improvements in human rights protections. Their arbitrary arrests, as well as the routine 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 acknowledge the recent decision to release Patrick George Zaki, much more needs to be done to address the state of academic freedom in the country. We urge you to release Kholoud Said and Marwa Arafa, along with all other scholars and prisoners of conscience in Egypt, and drop all charges against them, including those leveled against Patrick George Zaki. We urge you, as well, to end the practice of lengthy pre-trial detention, and to take meaningful steps toward improving the state of academic freedom in accordance with the "[First Seven Steps Statement](#)" that Egyptian human rights organizations released in May 2021.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Eve Troutt Powell
MESA President
Professor, University of Pennsylvania

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

cc:

Dr. Hanafi Gebali, Speaker, Egyptian Parliament

Motaz Zahran, Ambassador, Embassy of Egypt, Washington, D.C.

Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the UN



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Amb. Moushira Khattab, President, National Council for Human Rights, Cairo, Egypt

The Honorable Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN 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, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Yael Lempert, 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