



**Middle
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19 July 2022

His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
President, Arab Republic of Egypt
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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 persistent attacks on academic freedom in Egypt. Scholars remain in detention, while others face trial on baseless charges, and authorities continue to restrict the movements of some academic researchers.

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.

While we welcome the release of Kholoud Said on 2 June 2022 after she had spent over two years in remand detention, we are troubled that other researchers continue to face restrictive measures. On 4 July 2022, an emergency state security misdemeanors court sentenced researcher Ahmed Samir Santawy to three years in prison on the charge of publishing false news. An Egyptian national and second-year student in the Master's program in Sociology/Social Anthropology at the Central European University (CEU) in Vienna, Santawy had already been in detention for one and a half years and received a four-year sentence in June 2021 on the same charge before his case was sent to retrial earlier this year [see our letters dated [22 February 2021](#) and [10 February 2022](#)].

Other academics currently serving a prison sentence for peaceful expression of opinion include Ismail Alexandrani, a sociopolitical researcher, investigative journalist, and expert on militant groups in North Sinai. Alexandrani, who was arrested on 29 November 2015 upon his arrival at Hurgada International Airport on his way to visit his ailing mother, was

sentenced by a military court on baseless accusations that he had obtained and published military secrets, joined a banned group, and spread false news abroad [see our letter dated [8 February 2016](#)]. We are very concerned that Alexandrani's health has [reportedly](#) deteriorated during his time in prison.

Other researchers have been detained without trial. Among them is freelance translator Marwa Arafa, who has been in detention for over two years on the baseless charge of joining a terrorist organization ([Case 570/2020](#)). Her detention has been renewed multiple times, most recently on 29 May 2022. According to the Egyptian Network for Human Rights, Ms. Arafa has been mistreated in prison. Similarly, Dr. Ahmed Al Tohamy Abdel-Hay, Assistant Professor of Political Science in the Faculty of Economic Studies and Political Science at Alexandria University, has been detained (case 649/20) without trial since 3 June 2020. [see our letter dated [24 November 2020](#)]. His detention was most recently renewed on 14 June 2022. Al Tohamy has been accused of joining a terrorist group, spreading false news and statements, and misusing social media.

Academics who are not behind bars continue to face the threat of imprisonment, as well as other severe constraints. For example, Patrick George Zaki, a student at the University of Bologna, Italy, is facing trial on the baseless charge of publishing false news. Zaki had been arrested on 7 February 2020 upon his arrival in Egypt for a family visit and was held in pre-trial detention until 8 December 2021 [see our letters dated [25 February 2020](#) & [18 February 2021](#)]. Another disturbing case is that of Waleed Khalil el-Sayed Salem, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Washington. Mr. Salem was released from detention in December 2018 and never formally charged with a crime. However, he has been prevented from leaving Egypt since the lifting of probationary restrictions against him in spring 2020 and is therefore unable to reunite with his daughter or continue his studies. He has tried to challenge the travel ban in court, but to no avail [see our letters dated [6 July 2018](#), [14 August 2019](#), [4 November 2020](#), and [4 May 2022](#)].

As we noted in previous letters, restrictions on academic freedom in Egypt constitute violations 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 freedom of scientific research. We urge you to release without delay Ahmed Samir Santawy, Ismail Alexandrani, Marwa Arafa, and Ahmed Al Tohamy Abdel-Hay, and to drop all charges against them as well as against Patrick George Zaki. We also call on you to allow Waleed Salem to move freely, reunite with his family living abroad, and resume his studies.



Re: Concern for academics in detention, facing trial, or with restricted movement

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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
Amb. Moushira Khattab, President, National Council for Human Rights, Cairo,
Egypt
Mohamad Anwar El-Sadat, President, Reform and Development Party, 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