



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

Headquarters & Secretariat

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4 April 2024

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 on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North
America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our
concern regarding the continuing deterioration of academic freedom in
Egypt.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the
Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the
Association publishes the prestigious *International Journal of Middle East
Studies* and has nearly 2,800 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
outside of North America.

While we welcomed the pardoning of University of Bologna MA student
Patrick Zaki last summer (see our statement dated [24 July 2023](#)), we remain
alarmed about the continuing detention of other academics and researchers.
Among them is Islamic scholar Dr. Salah Soltan, who was sentenced to
death and life in prison in two separate cases featuring violations of basic
standards of due process and fair trial (see our letter dated [14 September
2022](#)). In addition, several other academics have been detained without trial
for over three years, the maximum length of time an individual can legally
be held in remand detention. They include freelance translator Ms. Marwa
Arafa, who has been detained since April 2020 (see our letters dated [10
February 2022](#), [6 May 2021](#), and [28 May 2020](#)), and whose detention was
most recently renewed [on 5 March 2024](#), as well as Alexandria University
Assistant Professor of Political Science Ahmed Al Tohamy Abdel-Hay,
whose detention was [renewed on 11 January 2024](#) (see our letter dated [15
June 2021](#)). Dr. Seif Fateen, Professor of Chemical Engineering at Zewail

University, has also been detained since November 2018. Moreover, we feel compelled to bring to your attention the case of economic researcher Ayman Hadhoud, who died in the custody of Egyptian authorities after his forced disappearance in February 2022. We urge you to heed the longstanding calls for an independent investigation into Mr. Hadhoud's death.

We had hoped that the release of a new human rights strategy in September 2021 would lead, as was announced, to an improvement in the human rights situation in Egypt. Then in May 2023 and at the initiative of President al-Sisi, a National Dialogue regarding the country's political and economic future was launched. However, despite these two potentially important developments, the evidence indicates that little has changed; indeed, academic freedom continues to deteriorate in Egypt.

On 11 July 2023, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) in Egypt [presented a paper at the National Dialogue](#) which emphasized some of the key concerns about academic freedom and university autonomy in Egypt. Among the concerns expressed were: the limits on universities' independence; the intervention of the security sector in teaching and research and its targeting of professors who speak in public about public concerns and state policies; the requirement that professors receive approval from the security forces to travel outside the country; the security restrictions on hosting academic talks and conferences; and the various restrictions on student unions. On 11 October 2023, the AFTE followed up with a [report](#) about the expanded surveillance of academics as they went about their off-campus activities. Since the presentation of the National Dialogue paper and the publication of this report, no action appears to have been taken to put an end to these coercive practices which violate the 2014 Egyptian Constitution's Article 65, guaranteeing freedom of speech and freedom in all means of expression and publications, and Article 23, which ensures freedom of scientific research.

The progress that you have called for in Egypt cannot take place without improvements in the conditions of scientific research, inquiry and freedom of expression. We, therefore, call upon you to respect the 2014 Constitution's provision of freedom of speech, publications and scientific research. We also call upon you to release without delay all academics, scholars and translators who remain in detention, end travel bans for scholars, and lift the myriad security restrictions on universities and their faculties. In short, we urge you to take all necessary measures 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.



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We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asli U. Bali'.

Aslı Ü. Bâli

MESA President

Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand'.

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

Volker Türk, 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



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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

Barbara A. Leaf, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern
Affairs, Department of State, United States Government