

URGENT ACTION

MAHIENOUR EL-MASSRY HELD IN WORSE CONDITIONS

Prisoner of conscience Mahienour El-Massry's prison conditions are "atrocious", her family said. She is serving a 15-month jail sentence, along with two others.

Prisoner of conscience **Mahienour El-Massry's** detention conditions have been "atrocious" for the past three weeks, her family said in a 31 October statement published on the Free Mahienour Facebook page. Families are no longer being allowed to bring in food and other basic necessities; instead, the prison authorities have told inmates to buy these things from the prison canteen, which many cannot afford, Mahienour El-Massry's sister Maysoon said in the statement. Mahienour is held in al-Abadeya women's prison in the city of Damanhour.

Mahienour El-Massry's 5x6 metre cell is overcrowded, and water is only available for four hours a day causing a deterioration in hygiene. The detainees have appealed to the prison warden and National Council for Human Rights. The prison head said they need to wait for 10 to 15 days for the water problem to be resolved. Detainees have long complained of poor prison conditions in Egypt. A human rights lawyer told Amnesty International that the authorities prevented him from visiting Mahienour El-Massry in prison for no legitimate reason.

On 31 May an appeal court reduced Mahienour El-Massry's sentence from two years in jail to 15 months upholding her conviction, alongside those of journalist **Youssef Shaaban** and activist **Loay El-Kahwagi**, for offences that include "protesting in front of al-Raml police station and inside it", which is located in Alexandria city, "attacking police officers and staff", and "insulting the Interior Ministry". An appeal against their sentence was rejected on 20 September. Youssef Shaaban is ill with hepatitis C: he asked in August to be freed on medical grounds, but the request was rejected by the court. Prison authorities have stopped him from receiving the medication he needs, his wife said.

Please write immediately in Arabic or your own language:

- Calling on the Egyptian authorities to release Mahienour El-Massry immediately and unconditionally, and ensure her conviction is quashed, as she is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Ensure the deteriorating conditions of detention in al-Abadeya prison are urgently addressed;
- Urging them to release Youssef Shaaban and Loay El-Kahwagi, and ensure their conviction is quashed, as they appear to have been detained for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, or else charge them with a recognizably criminal offence in proceedings that meet international fair trial standards;
- Calling on them to provide Youssef Shaaban with any medical attention he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 DECEMBER 2015 TO:

Public Prosecutor

Nabil Sadek

Office of the Public Prosecutor

Madinat Al-Rehab

New Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

Fax: +202 2 638 1956

(switched off after office hours, GMT+2)

Salutation: Dear Counsellor

President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

Office of the President

Al Ittihadia Palace

Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

Fax: +202 2 391 1441

Email: p.spokesman@op.gov.eg

alaa.youssef@op.gov.eg

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Deputy Assistant Minister for Foreign

Affairs for Human Rights

Mahy Hassan Abdel Latif

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Corniche al-Nil, Cairo

Arab Republic of Egypt

Fax: +202 2 574 9713

Email: Contact.US@mfa.gov.eg

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 107/15. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/1867/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This is not the first time Mahienour El-Massry's family have complained of poor prison conditions. In June, her lawyer filed a complaint with the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) about overcrowding and poor ventilation in the cell. In September, her family reacted angrily to claims by the NCHR that Mahienour El-Massry was not there when they went to visit al-Abadeya prison; in fact, her family say she was never asked to meet with them. Mahienour El-Massry has also complained of other prisoners' torture and ill-treatment at the prison hospital, strip searches by prison wardens, the cell doors being locked at 4pm, and prison visits that are much shorter than the 60 minutes permitted under Egyptian law.

Mahienour El-Massry, Youssef Shaaban and Loay El-Kahwagi were convicted of "rallying in front of al-Raml police station and inside it" (6 months), "attacking police officers and staff" (6 months). The three said they had actually been protesting peacefully inside and outside the police station in solidarity with lawyers being detained and interrogated at al-Raml police station on 29 March 2013.

Three lawyers were detained on 29 March 2013 by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who took them to the al-Raml police station and accused them of being their political opponents who might try to set fire to their offices, according to testimony by Mahienour El-Massry and fellow lawyer Nasser Khattab, who went to the police station to be present when the three lawyers were being questioned. This was during the government of former president Mohamed Morsi, who had been a senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood before he took office.

Nasser Khattab said in his testimony that police officers prevented other lawyers from attending the questioning and assaulted them verbally and physically. The lawyers who were attacked decided to take part in a protest sit-in at the police station until they received an official apology from the Ministry of Interior to the Lawyers' Syndicate, of which the lawyers were members, or the Public Prosecution opened an official investigation into the incident. Neither of these things happened, so the protest continued late into the night with solidarity protesters standing outside the police station as well.

Police officers from across Alexandria, as well as about 500 army officers and two police vehicles, arrived outside al-Raml police station at about 1.30am, according to Youssef Shaaban's video-recorded testimony. His wife, Ranwa Mohamed Youssef Ali, said in a television interview that police officers had sexually assaulted her as they were trying to arrest her husband. The police arrested a number of people at the scene, including Mahienour El-Massry, Youssef Shaaban and Loay El-Kahwagi, but released them later that day.

The case was set aside but reopened on 20 March 2014 when 11 people, including Mahienour El-Massry, Youssef Shaaban and Loay El-Kahwagi were faced with the same charges that include "attacking police officers" and "storming al-Raml police station". All 11 were sentenced to two years in prison, and a fine of 5,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$620), on 9 February 2015. Mahienour El-Massry, Youssef Shaaban and Loay El-Kahwagi appealed. The others were tried in their absence, and are in hiding, according to a defence lawyer working on the case.

Mahienour El-Massry is a prominent human rights lawyer in Alexandria, where she plays a leading role in defending workers' and refugees' rights. While she was detained in 2014, she was awarded the prestigious Ludovic Trarieux Human Rights Prize, given each year to a lawyer working in defence of human rights.

Name: Mahienour El-Massry (f), Youssef Shaaban (m), Loay El-Kahwagi (m)

Further information on UA: 107/15 Index: MDE 12/2845/2015 Issue Date: 9 November 2015