

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED JOURNALIST ACCUSED OF TERRORISM

On 30 August 2020, unlawfully detained journalist and human rights defender, **Esraa Abdelfattah**, was brought in front of the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) for questioning on accusations of "joining a terrorist organization" as part of the recently opened case (No. 855/2020).

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Public Prosecutor Hamada al-Sawi
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Madinat al-Rehab, Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
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Dear counsellor,

I am writing to raise concerns about the ongoing arbitrary detention of journalist and human rights defender **Esraa Abdelfattah**. Amnesty International considers her to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for her peaceful practice of her rights to freedom of expression, association and participation in public affairs.

Esraa was abducted from the street by security forces in plain clothes on 12 October 2019 and held for eight hours at an undisclosed location managed by the National Security Agency (NSA), a specialized police force, during which time she said she was tortured. The next day she was transferred to the SSSP, a special branch of the prosecution responsible for investigating security threats, which ordered her detention in relation to case (No. 488/2019) over investigations into unfounded charges of "joining a terrorist group in achieving its goals", "disseminating false news" and "misusing social media". The SSSP prosecutor questioned Esraa about her previous political activism. Since then, her pre-trial detention has been renewed, most recently on 24 August by the Cairo Criminal Court for another 45 days.

On 30 August 2020, Esraa was brought in front of the SSSP to face questioning over investigations into a new case (No. 855/2020). The case includes activists like Mahienour el-Masry, journalist Solafa Magdy and human rights lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer. Esraa was accused of "joining a terrorist organization" and "participating in a criminal agreement intended to commit a terrorist crime from inside prison". Esraa's lawyer told Amnesty International that the SSSP prosecutor accused Esraa of communicating with individuals outside prison to spread rumours and false news. He claimed that she was able to engage in such acts while in the prison courtyard exercising and during court sessions and appearances at the prosecution's office. Esraa argued that the accusations were baseless as she had been cut off from the outside world from 10 March to 22 August 2020, when all prison visits were suspended by the authorities citing COVID-19 concerns. After questioning her, the SSSP ordered her detention for 15 days, pending investigations.

I therefore ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Esraa Abdelfattah and drop all charges against her. Pending her release, I urge you to ensure that she is provided with means to regularly communicate with her family and lawyers. I also urge the Egyptian authorities to immediately release all those detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly and take measures to protect the health of all prisoners amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Esraa Abdelfattah's allegations that she was tortured and otherwise ill-treated must be independently and thoroughly investigated and those suspected of criminal responsibility must be brought to justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts and without recourse to death penalty.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On the night of 12 October 2019, Esraa Abdelfattah was abducted from her car before being taken to an undisclosed place of detention, managed by the National Security Agency (NSA), and was barred from contacting her family or lawyers. According to Esraa's account, an NSA officer threatened to torture her after she refused to grant him access to her mobile phone. Several men then entered the room where she was held and began beating her on her face and body. The same NSA officer returned and ordered her again to unlock her phone. When Esraa refused again, the officer took off her sweatshirt, tied it around her neck and threatened to strangle her saying: "your life in exchange for the phone", until she gave him her password. The officer then cuffed her hands and legs to prevent her from sitting or kneeling and kept her in a standing position for almost eight hours. Another officer warned that she would face further torture if she reported what had happened to the prosecutor. The following day, she described her ordeal to the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), but prosecutors dismissed her complaint and failed to order investigations. Shortly after her arrest, Esraa went on hunger strike in protest of her detention and treatment. On 22 November 2019, she suspended it because of her deteriorating health condition.

The initial case opened against Esraa (No. 488/2019) includes human rights defender and lawyer Mahienour el-Massry, politician Khalid Dawoud and political science professor Hassan Nefea. To date, the SSSP prosecutor did not produce any evidence against Esraa, other than an NSA investigation case file that neither she nor her lawyers were able to examine.

On 10 March 2020, the Egyptian authorities suspended all prison visits citing COVID-19 fears. The Ministry of Interior announced on 15 August 2020 the resumption of prison visits on 22 August, with some restrictions in place.

On 24 August, Esraa's sister was allowed to visit her. She learned that Esraa was taken to al-Qanater Prison hospital on 23 August as suffering a haemorrhage. Esraa told her sister that she also suffers from an irregular blood pressure and breathing difficulties that require oxygen therapy at the prison hospital.

Esraa Abdelfattah was among the first human rights defenders in Egypt to face a travel ban in relation to the NGO foreign funding case known as "Case 173". She was prevented from boarding a plane from Cairo International Airport on 13 January 2015. Since then, at least 30 other human rights defenders and civil society staff members have been banned from travel in relation to "Case 173".

She is among the several prominent human rights defenders who have been rounded up in the aftermath of rare anti-government protests that broke out on 20 September 2019.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic or English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 17 November 2020.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Esraa Abdelfattah (she/her)