

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST INTERROGATED OVER NEW TERRORISM CHARGES

On 30 August 2020, the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) interrogated arbitrarily detained journalist, Solafa Magdy, on new unfounded charges including "joining a terrorist group" as part of the recently opened case (No.855/2020). She is already under investigations by the SSSP over trumped-up "terrorism"-related charges in a separate case.

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

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Dear Counsellor,

I am writing to you to raise our concerns about the ongoing arbitrary detention of journalist **Solafa Magdy** and her deteriorating health. Amnesty International considers her to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for carrying out her media work and for defending victims of human rights violations. Solafa Magdy has been arbitrarily detained since 26 November 2019 as part of another case (No.488/2019), which relates to the March 2019 anti-government protests, along with her husband and freelance journalist **Hossam el-Sayed** and journalist **Mohamed Salah**.

On 30 August 2020, Solafa Magdy was brought in front of the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), a special branch of the Public Prosecution responsible for prosecuting crimes that relate to "state security", to face questioning over investigations into a new case (No. 855/2020). She was accused of "joining a terrorist group", "spreading and broadcasting false rumours" and "misuse of social media". When asked about the charges, Solafa exercised her right to remain silent. In response to the prosecutor's question on the reason for her silence, she noted that she saw no difference between this investigation and her initial investigation over similar accusations in relation to case (No.488/2019). After questioning her, the SSSP ordered her detention for 15 days, pending investigations. On 1 November 2020, the Cairo Criminal Court renewed her detention for 45 days in case (No.488/2019).

On 31 August 2020, Solafa's mother was able to see her for 30 minutes in al-Qanater Prison for women. Amnesty International learned that Solafa was suffering from kidney pain and that she experienced breathing difficulties that required oxygen therapy at the prison hospital.

I therefore ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Solafa Magdy, Hossam el-Sayed and Mohamed Salah. I call on you to also ensure that - pending their release – they are provided with means to regularly communicate with their families and lawyers and access to adequate health care. I finally urge the Egyptian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those detained solely for carrying out their media work and for peacefully expressing their opinions.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Solafa Magdy, Hossam el-Sayed and Mohamed Salah are freelance journalists working for different media outlets. Solafa and Hossam are married and have a seven-year-old son. Amnesty International believes that their detention is solely based on their writings and social media activism defending victims of human rights violations.

In a separate investigation (Case No. 488/2019), Solafa Magdy and Mohamed Salah are facing trumped-up charges of “joining a terrorist group” and “spreading false news”, while Hossam el-Sayed is accused of “membership in a terrorist group”. Between 15 March 2020 and 4 May 2020, the Egyptian ministry of justice suspended all hearings before courts as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Since early May 2020, “terrorism-circuit” judges have extended the pre-trial detention orders of over 1,600 detainees in the absence of any due process guarantees: defendants were not present in court, while lawyers were prevented from presenting their defence. Solafa Magdy, like other pre-trial detainees, was not transferred to court for detention renewal hearings until mid-July 2020.

In addition to Solafa, the new case (No. 855/2020) opened by the SSSP also includes other prisoners of conscience, already held in pre-trial detention in relation to separate investigations into similar unfounded “terrorism”-related charges, such as human rights defender Mahienour el-Masry, journalist Esraa Abdelfattah and human rights lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer. Solafa's lawyer told Amnesty International that the SSSP prosecutor accused her of communicating with individuals outside prison to spread rumours and false news. He claimed that she was able to engage in such acts while exercising in the prison courtyard and during court sessions at the prosecution's office. The lawyers argued that the accusations were baseless as she had been cut off from the outside world for months due to the suspension of prison visits and court hearings by the authorities citing COVID-19 concerns. According to information gathered by Amnesty International, prosecutors have based accusations against Solafa and the other prisoners of conscience mainly on National Security Agency (NSA) investigations case files, which defendants and their lawyers were not allowed to examine. In recent months, the SSSP has been increasingly bypassing court or prosecution decisions to release detainees held in prolonged pre-trial detention by issuing new detention orders covering similar charges.

Since President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power, the authorities have cracked down on independent reporting and arbitrarily blocked hundreds of websites, raided and/or closed the offices of at least nine media outlets and arbitrarily detained scores of journalists. The organization is aware of at least 36 journalists detained at the time of writing solely for carrying-out their legitimate work or for expressing opinions on their personal social media platforms.

The arrest of Solafa, Hossam and Mohamed came in the context of the post-September 2019 protest crackdown, the largest on dissenting voices since 2014. Amnesty International has [documented](#) how Egyptian security forces carried-out sweeping arrests of peaceful protesters, journalists, human rights lawyers, activists and political figures in a bid to silence critics and deter further protests. According to Egyptian human rights lawyers and activists, the authorities ordered the pre-trial detention of at least 3,715 people pending investigations on “terrorism”-related charges in the largest single protests-related criminal investigation in Egypt's history.

In September 2020, small and scattered protests took place in several villages, towns and poor urban communities in Egypt, where protesters took to the streets against the government's policy of demolishing unregistered houses and a law on reconciliation for unregistered houses. Some protestors also chanted against President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and protested the killing of one man during a police raid in Luxor governorate. Egyptian security forces responded with teargas, batons, birdshot and on at least one occasion live ammunition, and arrested hundreds of protestors and bystanders. Hundreds remain in detention pending investigations on flawed “terrorism” and protest related charges.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 29 December 2020

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Solafa Magdy (she/her) **Hossam el-Sayed** (he/him) and **Mohamed Salah** (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/2262/2020/en/>