

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST DETAINED FOR A THIRD TIME

On 23 June 2020, the Egyptian security forces arrested human rights activist Sanaa Seif from outside the Public Prosecutor's office in New Cairo, where she was waiting to file a complaint after suffering a violent assault a day earlier. Sanaa Seif, her sister and mother were beaten by several women in front of the Tora Prison Complex in full view of security forces.

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
Fax: +202 2577 4716
Twitter: @EgyptJustice

Dear Counsellor,

Human rights activist Sanaa Seif, 26, has been arbitrarily detained since 23 June 2020 pending investigations into unfounded "terrorism"-related and other bogus charges, solely stemming from her exercise of her right to freedom of expression and her peaceful activism. She is a prisoner of conscience, who should be immediately and unconditionally released.

On 23 June 2020, Egyptian security forces whisked Sanaa Seif from outside the Public Prosecutor's office in New Cairo, where she was waiting to file a complaint in relation to a violent assault a day earlier. Sanaa Seif was then taken to the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), a branch of the Public Prosecution specialized in investigating national security threats, where prosecutors questioned her over charges of "disseminating false news", "inciting terrorist crimes" and "misuse of social media". On 9 August 2020, she was again brought to the SSSP Cairo headquarters, without her lawyers being notified. The SSSP opened investigations into two additional charges, namely "verbally insulting a police officer on duty" and "defaming a police officer". These charges relate to Sanaa Seif speaking out against a police officer when he pushed her mother on the day of the assault and relaying the incident on her social media.

On 30 August 2020, Mona Seif was able to visit her sister in al-Qanater Women's Prison. Sanaa Seif told her sister that she was in good health and believed that she was likely to be referred to trial soon.

Sanaa Seif's brother, activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, has also been in arbitrary detention since September 2019. On 22 June 2020, Sanaa Seif, her mother and sister were waiting outside the Tora Prison Complex to receive a letter from him when they were beaten and robbed by a group of women armed with sticks, in full view of security forces.

We therefore urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Sanaa Seif and ensure that all charges against her are dropped. Pending her release, I urge you to ensure that she is provided with the means to regularly communicate with her family and lawyer, and access to adequate health care. We also urge you to take measures to end the relentless harassment of her family, and conduct independent, impartial and thorough investigations into the assault against Sanaa Seif, her mother and sister in front of the Tora Prison Complex on 22 June in full view of security forces.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 22 June 2020, Sanaa Seif was waiting outside the Tora Prison Complex in Cairo to receive a letter from her arbitrarily detained brother, Alaa Abdel Fattah. Her mother, Laila Soueif, and sister, Mona Seif, were with her. A group of women approached the family and beat them with sticks, tore their clothes, dragged them onto the ground and stole some of their belongings. One policeman reportedly pushed Laila Soueif towards the assailants, while another ordered the assailants to “take them outside [the waiting area]”. The assault left visible marks on the women’s bodies according to photos examined by Amnesty International.

Sanaa Seif’s detention has been renewed twice in her and her lawyers’ absence, denying her the right to challenge the lawfulness of her detention in violation of Egypt’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Both times, Sanaa Seif was transferred to the prosecution’s building, but not actually brought in front of the prosecutor or allowed to see her family or lawyers. Prison visits, which had been suspended for five months following the COVID-19 outbreak, resumed in August 2020 with some restrictions in place. Prison authorities allowed Sanaa Seif’s relatives to deliver a letter for her on 12 July 2020. On 16 August 2020, prison authorities allowed her sister to deliver medicine and food but did not allow the entry of books and a radio.

Sanaa Seif and her family have suffered years of harassment and intimidation for their human rights activism. On 18 March 2020, Laila Soueif, Mona Seif, Sanaa’s aunt Ahdaf Soueif and university professor Rabab el-Mahdi were arrested by security services in front of the Cabinet building in Cairo after they stood in peaceful protest on a pavement demanding the release of prisoners over fears of a COVID-19 outbreak in the country’s overcrowded prisons. A prosecutor accused them of “inciting a protest,” “disseminating false information” and “possession of material disseminating false information”. He then ordered their release pending investigations on bail of 5,000 Egyptian pounds (around US\$320). Although they made the bail payment the same day, they remained in detention overnight without legal grounds. On 19 March 2020, the authorities transferred Laila Soueif to the SSSP, where a prosecutor ordered her release on bail of 3,000 Egyptian pounds (around US\$190). All four were released that night.

Sanaa Seif is a human rights activist and film editor. Sanaa Seif, human rights defender Yara Sallam and 20 others were arrested on 21 June 2014 in the Cairo suburb of Heliopolis, after a demonstration was dispersed by security forces in the area. They were charged with a string of offences, including “taking part in an unauthorized demonstration that endangered public order and security”, “vandalizing property”, “making a show of force in order to terrify and threaten the lives of passers-by”, and “participating in a gathering of over five people in order to disturb the public order and commit crimes”. Under the Law Regulating the Right to Public Gatherings, Processions and Peaceful Protests (Law 107 of 2013), protest organizers must submit their plans to the authorities, who have wide powers to cancel or reroute proposed demonstrations. On 26 October 2014, a Cairo Misdemeanour Court sentenced Sanaa Seif to three years’ imprisonment, followed by three years of probation, a fine of 10,000 Egyptian Pounds (around US\$630 at the time), and the payment of compensation for the damages caused. This sentence was later reduced on appeal on 28 December 2014 to two years’ imprisonment and a two-year probation. On 23 September 2015, Sanaa Seif was released following a presidential pardon. In a separate case, a Misdemeanour Court in Cairo sentenced her to six months in prison for insulting the judiciary on 4 May 2016. On 15 November 2016, Sanaa Seif was released from prison after serving the six-month sentence.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 2 November 2020.

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Sanaa Seif (she/her)