

# URGENT ACTION

## TORTURED MONK AT IMMINENT RISK OF EXECUTION

Death row prisoner monk Wael Tawadros, known as Father Isaiah, is at risk of execution. He was subjected to serious human rights violations including enforced disappearance, torture and unfair trial. A court convicted and sentenced him to death in April 2019 on the basis of his torture-tainted "confessions". The sentence was upheld on appeal. The number of executions more than tripled in Egypt in 2020, compared to the previous year, raising fears that more prisoners on death row are at risk of execution.

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

**Abdel Fattah al-Sisi**

Office of the President

Al Ittihadia Palace

Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

Fax +202 2391 1441

Email : [p.spokesman@op.gov.eg](mailto:p.spokesman@op.gov.eg)

Twitter: @AIsisiOfficial

Your Excellency,

**Monk Wael Tawadros**, known as Father Isaiah, is at imminent risk of execution. Wael Tawadros was convicted in April 2019 of killing a Bishop and sentenced to death following a grossly unfair trial; the court relied on his torture-tainted "confessions", even though he retracted them in court. In July 2020, the Court of Cassation upheld the death sentence, and the Grand Mufti approved it, making the sentence final. Wael Tawadros has no recourse other than a commutation from your Excellency.

Wael Tawadros' right to a fair trial was violated, including his right to access a lawyer, not to incriminate himself, and to receive a fair hearing before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal. According to his family, following his arrest on 5 August 2018, Wael Tawadros was subjected to an enforced disappearance. Until 28 August 2018, the Ministry of Interior refused to acknowledge his detention and reveal his fate and whereabouts. According to an oral statement given by Wael Tawadros in court on 27 January 2019, a recording of which was reviewed by Amnesty International, during this period, police officers took him to the monastery, where the murder took place, stripped him naked, forced him to wear his monk's robe, beat him, gave him electric shocks, and then ordered him to act out the alleged murder on camera.

According to Wael Tawadros's family, the Abaadiya prison administration, in Al-Behira governorate, northern Egypt, where he has been held since August 2018, has been subjecting him to discriminatory and punitive treatment, by preventing him from any written correspondence and denying him regular access to a priest, in violation of international standards and Egyptian law. Others held at the same prison are granted such rights. Furthermore, he is held in a prison hundreds of kilometres from his family's residence in Asyut governorate, increasing the costs of prison visits and putting an undue financial burden on his family.

**I urge you to commute the death sentence against Wael Tawadros , whose conviction should be quashed and who should be retried in accordance with international fair trial standards in proceedings that exclude coerced "confessions" and without recourse to the death penalty. I also urge you to ensure that he has regular access to his family, lawyer and a qualified representative of his religion. Finally, I urge you to immediately establish an official moratorium on executions, as a first step towards abolishing the death penalty.**

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Wael Tawadros was arrested in connection with the killing of a Bishop, which took place on 29 July 2018 at the Monastery of St. Macarius in Wadi al-Natrun, Behira governorate, northwest of Cairo. According to the case file, examined by Amnesty International, authorities claimed that he was arrested on 10 August 2018, at a checkpoint in Behira governorate. However, according to informed sources, police forces arrested him on 5 August 2018 from the Monastery of St. Macarius. The police then took him to an undisclosed location and forcibly disappeared him until 10 August 2018. On 10 August 2018, he was brought in front of a prosecutor and questioned without a lawyer. According to the case file, on 5 August 2018 the prosecution ordered that Wael Tawadros be barred from communicating with anyone during the investigations. The authorities did not allow his family or lawyer to contact him until 28 August 2018. A lawyer, initially secured to represent Wael Tawadros, testified during the trial that he was compelled to withdraw from the case after being barred from communicating with his client.

According to individuals who attended the trial at the Damanhour Criminal Court and written complaints submitted by his lawyers, the judge exhibited bias against Wael Tawadros, including by addressing him in a derogatory manner and mocking his monastic name and answers. Lawyers also claimed that the judge refused to consider exculpatory evidence and record defence arguments and the name of the police officer the defendant accused of torturing him in the minutes of the hearing. The police officer testified as a prosecution witness. The judge also failed to order investigations into Wael Tawadros' claims of torture, despite his and his lawyers' repeated requests. There were no witnesses to the crime; and no CCTV footage or other material evidence was presented in court. Forensic experts who examined the body also gave contradictory statements. Wael Tawadros added in his testimony in court that after he had been taken to a hospital for a medical examination based on the order of the judge reviewing his bail hearing, the police officer ordered a medical worker to write that he was "fine".

Despite these flagrant violations and absence of credible evidence, on 24 April 2019, the Damanhour Criminal Court convicted Wael Tawadros and another defendant of killing Anba Epiphanius and sentenced both men to death, relying almost exclusively on his torture-tainted "confessions". On 1 July 2020, the Court of Cassation upheld the verdict against Wael Tawadros, despite acknowledging the violation of his right to defence counsel and without investigating his claims of torture. The court upheld the conviction against his co-defendant but reduced his sentence to life imprisonment. Following amendments to the Egyptian Code of Criminal Procedures in 2017, the Court of Cassation, which previously had the authority to quash verdicts and order retrials by criminal courts when it found errors in the application of the law at first instance, now itself looks into matters of law and substance and issues final verdicts. Rights defenders and legal experts opposed these amendments on the grounds that they undermine defendants' rights to a genuine review by limiting stages of appeal. Their concerns were heightened by other amendments introduced in 2017 undermining the independence of the judiciary by granting the President the authority to select heads of judicial bodies, including the Court of Cassation. In October 2020, five UN special procedures raised concerns over allegations of torture and the use of forced "confessions" to sentence Wael Tawadros to death and called for a halt to plans to execute him. They also [raised concerns](#) over the denial of his right to freedom of religion.

In 2020, the Egyptian authorities executed at least 107 individuals, marking a sharp rise in the number of recorded executions in the country from previous years. This shocking death toll is likely to be an underestimate, as Egyptian authorities do not publish statistics on executions or the number of prisoners on death row; nor do they inform families or lawyers in advance of executions. Egyptian authorities have also clamped down on human rights organizations working on the death penalty. While Egypt, like other governments, has a duty to bring to justice those responsible for violent criminal acts, this must be done in full compliance with Egypt's human rights obligations including rights to a fair trial. Amnesty International has consistently documented a pattern of violations of the right to fair trial in Egypt, including the right to adequate defence; to be brought promptly before a judge; to challenge the lawfulness of detention; to be presumed innocent; to remain silent and not to be compelled to incriminate oneself or to confess guilt; to obtain full access to relevant evidence; to receive a fair, public hearing before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal; and to a genuine review. Torture is rampant in Egypt, and frequently used to extract "confessions", while courts regularly fail to order investigations into allegations of torture and admit torture-tainted "confessions" as evidence.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Arabic or English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 22 June 2021

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

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Wael Tawadros (He/him)