

URGENT ACTION

JAILED MUSICIAN FACES TRUMPED-UP CHARGES

On 5 May 2018, Egyptian authorities arrested 33-year-old musician Rami Sidky at Cairo International Airport. He was detained in connection with a satirical music video, “Balaha,” which had gone viral ahead of the March 2018 presidential elections, and appeared to poke fun at President El-Sisi. According to his lawyer, Rami Sidky took no part in writing, producing or performing the “Balaha” song. The authorities had already detained the alleged author of the lyrics in March 2018, along with four other individuals accused of involvement in the track production. In addition, Amnesty International considers that the song is part and parcel of the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. Rami Sidky, along with his co-defendants in case 480/2018, are facing the trumped-up charges of “membership of a terrorist group” and “insulting the president.” On 9 February 2019, a judge extended Sidky’s pre-trial detention for another 45 days.

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

*Public Prosecutor Nabil Sadek
Office of the Public Prosecutor, Dar alQada
Al-Ali, Downtown
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2577 4716*

Dear Counsellor,

Rami Sidky, a 33-year-old Egyptian guitarist, has been detained since May 2018 in connection with a song he neither wrote, nor produced, nor performed. His detention has been renewed since then, and on 9 February 2019, a judge extended his pre-trial detention for another 45 days.

On 5 May 2018, security forces arrested Sidky at Cairo International Airport while he was on his way back from a concert in Beirut. The authorities held him incommunicado for more than 24 hours, during which they told his family he never left the airport. Sidky is currently held in pre-trial detention in Tora Investigation Prison, facing the trumped-up charges of “membership of a terrorist group” and “insulting the president”. The satirical song in question, “Balaha,” which had gone viral ahead of the presidential elections in March 2018, was deemed offensive to President El-Sisi by the authorities. Amnesty International has found that the song does not contain any advocacy of hatred or incitement to violence or discrimination. Additionally, music is a form of acceptable expression, implicit in the right to freedom of expression guaranteed under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Egyptian Constitution. Amnesty International considers that the charges brought against Rami Sidky, as well as his co-defendants in case 480/2018, are unfounded and stem solely from the perceived peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Rami Sidky and his co-defendants, who are being detained solely for the perceived exercise of their right to freedom of expression. I also urge you to drop all charges against Rami Sidky and his co-defendants in case 480/2018. The Egyptian authorities should ensure that, pending their release, Rami Sidky and his co-defendants are protected from torture and other ill-treatment and that their conditions of detention are in line with international standards.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to information received by Amnesty International, on 22 April 2018, National Security Agency (NSA) officers raided Rami Sidky's family house looking for him. They informed his family that Sidky was involved in the production of a song that the authorities deemed to be offensive to President El-Sisi. On 24 April, Sidky went to an NSA office along with a lawyer to inquire about the officers' visit. The authorities denied there was any visit by the NSA, telling them it was probably thieves. The authorities claimed there was no issue with regards to Sidky's musical activities and assured them that he could travel freely. However, on 5 May, the authorities arrested Sidky at Cairo International Airport while he was on his way back from Beirut, where he was performing with his band "Jimi and the Saint". The authorities held him incommunicado for more than 24 hours and told his family that he had not left the airport. On 6 May, security forces took him to a police station in New Cairo for interrogation. Later that night, the authorities finally allowed Sidky to reach out to his family and inform them of his whereabouts. On 27 May, he was moved to Tora Investigation Prison in Cairo, and his detention has been renewed ever since. On 9 February 2019, a judge extended his pre-trial detention for another 45 days.

Sidky is facing trumped-up charges of "membership of a terrorist group" and "insulting the president", along with four other individuals. Sidky's co-defendants were all detained on the basis of the satirical song "Balaha." The authorities had released the fifth co-defendant in September 2018. According to Sidky's lawyer, the authorities kept reassuring Sidky and his family that they knew he was not involved in the song, promising his imminent release. Nine months later, his pre-trial detention continues to be renewed.

Between 2011 and 2013, Sidky played in a band along with the singer of the "Balaha" song, after which he cut off his engagement with the band and the singer. In 2015, he co-founded a different band called "Jimi and the Saint". Wary of the intensified crackdown on the right to freedom of expression in Egypt in the last few years, Sidky veered off political commentary and focused his music on social issues. Ahead of the March 2018 presidential elections, "Balaha" was released on YouTube and immediately went viral, receiving the ire of the Egyptian authorities who deemed it offensive to President El-Sisi. The alleged author of the lyrics is currently in detention facing two separate cases.

Amnesty International found that the song is devoid of incitement to violence or hatred and therefore falls under the protection of the right to freedom of expression. Amnesty International considers Sidky's detention to be arbitrary, the charges he and his co-defendants are facing to be unfounded, and the entire case to be trumped up.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic/ English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 16 April 2019

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Rami Sidky (He/him)