

URGENT ACTION

TORTURED DEFENDER TRIED BY SPECIAL COURT

Human rights defender Patrick George Zaki was referred to trial by the Emergency State Security Court on charges of spreading “false news”, based on an article he wrote describing the discrimination faced by Coptic Christians in Egypt. If convicted, he faces up to five years’ imprisonment. Patrick George Zaki is a prisoner of conscience who must be immediately and unconditionally released as he is held solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

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

President Abdelfattah al-Sisi
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Your Excellency,

*In September, human rights defender and master’s student **Patrick George Zaki** was referred to trial in front of the Emergency State Security Court (ESSC) on the charge of "spreading false news at home and abroad" in connection to an article published in 2019, containing exurbs from his personal diary about the discrimination faced by Coptic Christians in Egypt. He already spent 20 months in unjust pretrial detention pending investigations into charges of "disseminating false news", "incitement to protest" and "incitement to violence and terrorist crimes" in a separate case. Proceedings by the ESSCs, which are special courts activated when there is a state of emergency, are inherently unfair, and their verdicts are not subject to appeal. His trial was adjourned to 7 December following requests by his lawyer to obtain a copy of his casefile.*

Patrick George Zaki’s friends and supporters were able to see him during the 28 September court hearing and reported that he appeared angry and distraught by his unjust detention. Even though he suffers from asthma, he has not been vaccinated against Covid-19. His lawyers’ complaint to the administrative court against the failure of the authorities to vaccinate him was pending at the time of writing. He is also suffering from back pain due to his detention conditions and is forced to sleep on rough blankets on the floor as prison authorities deny him a bed or mattress.

Patrick George Zaki has been detained in Tora Investigation Prison since his arbitrary arrest at Cairo airport in February 2020 upon his return from Italy where he was studying. According to his lawyers, following his arrest, National Security Agency (NSA) officers subjected him to torture and other ill-treatment, including though the administration of electric shocks and beatings during interrogations which revolved around his human rights work. Amnesty International considers Patrick George Zaki to be a prisoner of conscience held solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights.

I therefore ask you to ensure that Patrick George Zaki is released immediately and unconditionally and that all charges against him are dropped, as they stem solely from his exercise of his human rights. I also urge you to open an independent investigation into his torture allegations, with a view to bringing those responsible to justice. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he is provided with adequate access to healthcare, including to Covid-19 vaccines, and held in conditions meeting international standards on the treatment of prisoners.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Patrick George Zaki was a human rights researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), a renowned independent human rights organization in Egypt, with a focus on gender and sexual minorities. In August 2019, he moved to Italy to do his Master's in Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Bologna.

In recent months, Egyptian authorities have referred an increasing number of human rights defenders, politicians and journalists to trial in front of the Emergency State Security Court (ESSC) on charges of spreading "false news". Many of those referred to trial by the ESSC had been in prolonged pretrial detention pending investigations by the Supreme Security State Prosecution (SSSP) into bogus terrorism-related charges in separate cases, in some cases for periods exceeding two years, the absolute maximum period for pretrial detention permissible under Egyptian law. Proceedings in front of the ESSC are inherently unfair and deny defendants the right to have their convictions and sentences reviewed by a higher tribunal. Lawyers have also raised concerns about other violations of their clients' right to a fair trial in front of the ESSC, including the right to have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of their defence and to communicate with counsel of their own choosing. Judges at the ESSC routinely deny requests by defence lawyers to photocopy casefiles, which in some cases exceed 2,000 pages, instead instructing them to review them in court. Prosecutors and judges have also failed to provide copies of indictment orders to defendants and their lawyers, undermining their right to be informed of the exact nature and cause of charges against them.

Among those convicted by the ESSC is student Ahmed Samir Santawy; on 22 June 2021, the court sentenced him to four years in prison on charges of publishing "false news". His conviction is based solely on social media posts criticizing human rights violations in Egypt and the state's mishandling of the pandemic. In July 2021, human rights lawyer and former parliamentarian, Zyad el-Elaimy, journalist and politician Hossam Moanis, trade unionist and socialist politician Hisham Fouad, and three others were referred to trial ESSC on the charge of "spreading false news to undermine the state, national security, public security and spreading panic among the people", solely due to their peaceful political activities. On 23 August 2021, the SSSP referred human rights defender and founder of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, Ezzat Ghoniem, human rights lawyer [Hoda Abdelmoniem](#), and Aisha al-Shater, the daughter of senior Muslim Brotherhood figure Shairat al-Shater, among others, to trial in front of the ESSC on a number of charges including membership in a terrorist group (the Muslim Brotherhood) and disseminating "false news" about human rights abuses by security forces through a Facebook page titled "the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms". In October, prominent activist Alaa Abdelfattah, human rights lawyer Mohamed Baker and blogger Mohamed Ibrahim, known as Mohamed Oxygen, were also referred to trial in front of the ESSC on charges of spreading "false news".

While on 25 October 2021, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced his decision to lift the state of emergency, in place since April 2017, according to legislation governing the state of the emergency, defendants referred to trial while the state of emergency was in force will continue to be tried by emergency courts.

Patrick George Zaki's arrest came in the context of the post-September 2019 protest crackdown, the largest on dissenting voices since 2014. His arrest warrant was dated 24 September 2019. He joined the long list of human rights defenders and peaceful political activists behind bars in Egypt including [Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed el-Baqer](#). On 20 September 2019, scattered protests broke across Egyptian cities, calling on President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to resign. The protests had been triggered by viral videos in which Mohamed Ali, a former army contractor, accused army leaders and the president of wasting public money on building luxury properties. In the weeks that followed, Amnesty International [documented](#) how the 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 from taking place. According to Egyptian human rights lawyers, the authorities have arrested at least 4,000 individuals in relation to their perceived participation or support of the protests and ordered the pre-trial detention of at least 3,715 pending investigations over "terrorism" related charges in the largest single protests-related criminal investigation in Egypt's history.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 22 December 2021

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Patrick Zaki George (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/2188/2020/en/>