

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST IN PROLONGED ARBITRARY DETENTION

Journalist Mohamed Salah has been arbitrarily detained for 27 months without trial solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights. In a letter written from inside prison on 31 January, he called on the authorities to end his pre-trial detention, which has exceeded the maximum limit of two years permissible under Egyptian law. He must be immediately and unconditionally released, and his claims of being tortured or otherwise ill-treated effectively investigated.

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

Public Prosecutor Hamada al-Sawi

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Dear Counsellor,

*I am writing to raise concerns about the ongoing arbitrary detention of journalist **Mohamed Salah** since 26 November 2019 without charge or trial, and to call for his immediate and unconditional release as he is held solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights. On 19 July 2020, a court ordered his release in relation to investigations into accusations of "joining a terrorist group" and "spreading false news" in Case No. 488/2019 connected to anti-government protests in March 2019. He was not released, and in August 2020 the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) ordered his detention pending investigations into unfounded terrorism accusations in a new case (Case No. 855/2020). He remains in pre-trial detention in violation of the Code of Criminal Procedures, which sets the maximum duration for pre-trial detention at two years for crimes punishable by the death penalty or life imprisonment. He has not been charged, presented with evidence linking him to any crime, or allowed to challenge the lawfulness of his detention.*

On 30 January, a judge renewed Mohamed Salah's pre-trial detention for another 45 days in his absence. In an open letter written the following day from Mazra'at Tora prison, where he has been held since September 2021, Mohamed Salah called on the authorities to refer him to trial, noting that his continued pre-trial detention was unlawful. On 1 February, his lawyer filed a request to the Public Prosecutor calling for his release or referral to trial. The complaint was also shared with the National Council for Human Rights, the national human rights institution. On 6 February, Mohamed Salah's family joined the family of arbitrary detained human rights defender Ibrahim Ezz el-Din and the families of six other detainees in publicly calling for the releases of all pre-trial detainees held for over two years or their referral to trials.

On 23 July 2020, Mohamed Salah was transferred to Dar Essalam police station, where he remained held until his transfer to the Tora Investigations Prison on 10 January 2021. During this period, he reported being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment including beatings and denial of medical care, but no investigations were opened into his claims.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Mohamed Salah as he is held solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights and to open prompt, independent, impartial, transparent, and effective investigations into allegations that he has been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in Dar Essalam police station with a view of bringing those suspected to be responsible to justice.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mohamed Salah, a freelance journalist, was arrested on 26 November 2019 from a cafe in the Greater Cairo neighbourhood of Dokki and has since been arbitrarily detained pending investigations by the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), a special branch of the Public Prosecution responsible for prosecuting crimes that relate to “state security”, on accusations of “joining a terrorist group” and “spreading false news” as part of Case No. 488 /2019. Two journalists, married couple Solafa Magdy and Hossam el-Sayed, who were arrested with Mohamed Salah, were provisionally released on 14 April 2021 pending investigations.

On 19 July 2020, a court ordered Mohamed Salah’s provisional release pending investigations in relation to case No. 488/2019, and he was transferred to Dar Essalam police station on 23 July 2020 in preparation for his release. However, on 23 August 2020, the SSSP, ordered his detention pending investigations into a new case (No. 855/2020) over unfounded terrorism accusations. According to his family, he was not allowed visits from his transfer to the police station on 23 July 2020 until 28 December 2020, when relatives saw him for a few minutes after having submitted multiple requests and complaints in December 2020 to the Cabinet of Egypt, which is presided over by the Prime Minister. Relatives of his cellmates followed suit in submitting similar complaints. On 8 January 2021, in apparent retaliation for these complaints, security forces stripped Mohamed Salah and the 13 other detainees held in Cell 6 of Dar Essalam police station naked, suspended them by their feet and beat them using batons and water pipes. Security forces also confiscated their blankets, flooded the cell with cold water and denied them healthcare, including for injuries sustained from beatings. On 10 January 2021, Mohamed Salah was transferred to the Tora Investigations Prison, but barred from family visits until the end of March 2021. Informed sources reported that his injuries were infected, and his torn clothes were covered with blood when he was first transferred to prison. Authorities ignored requests by his lawyer and family to refer him to forensic examination to record his injuries. In two videos obtained by the [Guardian](#) and reviewed by Amnesty International, detainees at Dar Essalam police station are seen suspended in stress positions with visible bruises and other open wounds on their heads and bodies. No effective prompt, independent, impartial, transparent, and effective investigations have been conducted into claims of torture and other ill-treatment at Dar Essalam police station. On 15 February 2022, the Public Prosecution issued a [statement](#) claiming that the detainees, who appeared in the leaked videos, staged the incident and injured themselves in the aim of “destabilising the country, inciting strife, and spreading rumours”.

On 23 August 2021, SSSP prosecutors questioned Mohamed Salah in relation to a new case (No. 855/2020), accusing him of similar charges of “joining a terrorist group”, “spreading and broadcasting false rumours” and “misuse of social media”. In addition to Mohamed Salah, human rights defender and lawyer Mahienour el-Masry, journalists Esraa Abdelfattah and Solafa Magdy, and human rights defender and lawyer Mohamed Baker are also being investigated in Case No. 855/2020. While Mahienour el-Masry, Esraa Abdelfattah and Solafa Magdy were provisionally released pending investigations in 2021, Mohamed Baker remains imprisoned after an emergency court convicted him of the charge of “spreading false news undermining national security” and sentenced him to four years in prison on 21 December 2021.

According to information gathered by Amnesty International, prosecutors have based accusations against Mohamed Salah and others held in prolonged pre-trial detention for peacefully exercising their human rights mainly on National Security Agency investigations, which defendants and their lawyers are not allowed to examine. 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, in a practice commonly referred to as “rotation”. 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. At least 31 journalists were behind bars solely due to their media work or for expressing critical views on their social media accounts in December 2021.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 April 2022

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Mohamed Salah (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/4145/2021/en/