

URGENT ACTION

LIFE OF PROMINENT ACTIVIST AT IMMINENT RISK

The life of Egyptian-British activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, on hunger strike since 2 April, is at imminent risk. He escalated his hunger strike on 1 November stopping the 100 daily calorie intake he had previously consumed. In what he and his family view as a final bid for his freedom, he announced his decision to stop drinking water on 6 November, the start of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm al-Sheikh. Alaa Abdel Fattah, who has spent most of the last nine years unlawfully deprived of his liberty, was last arrested in September 2019. On 20 December 2021, he and human rights lawyer Mohamed Baker were convicted on bogus charges and sentenced to five and four years in prison, respectively, following a grossly unfair trial. They are prisoners of conscience, solely targeted for their peaceful activism, and should be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Email: p.spokesman@op.gov.eg
Twitter: @AlsisiOfficial

Dear President,

*I am writing to urge you to release arbitrarily detained activist Egyptian-British **Alaa Abdel Fattah** before it is too late. For over 200 days, he has been consuming only 100 calories a day to protest his unjust imprisonment and denial of consular visits. On 31 October, in a letter to his family, he announced that he was escalating his hunger strike by stopping any calorie intake. On 6 November, the first day of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27), he will stop drinking water as well. He wrote: "I've taken a decision to escalate at a time I see as fitting for my struggle for my freedom and the freedom of prisoners of a conflict they've no part in, or they're trying to exit from; for the victims of a regime that's unable to handle its crises except with oppression, unable to reproduce itself except through incarceration".*

There are now serious concerns for Alaa's life given his poor health and his determination to stop drinking water until the Egyptian authorities release him. Given also that the prison authorities have periodically denied written correspondence between Alaa and his family, I am concerned his family may not receive any information about him in the critical days after he stops drinking water. Their next prison visit is scheduled for 18 November.

Alaa Abdel Fattah was last arrested in September 2019, subjected to torture and other ill-treatment and convicted by an emergency court in December 2021 of bogus charges stemming solely from the peaceful exercise of his human rights. He is a prisoner of conscience, who should not have ever been detained. The detaining authorities are ultimately responsible for his life.

I urge you to release Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed Baker immediately and unconditionally, quash their convictions and drop all charges against them, as they are detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights. Alaa Abdel Fattah must have access to qualified health professionals providing health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent and be immediately granted a consular visit in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Alaa Abdel Fattah, a well-known political activist and government critic, has been repeatedly arrested in recent years including for his role in the 2011 uprising. Mohamed Baker is a human rights lawyer and director of Adalah Center for Rights and Freedoms, which he founded in 2014. They are among the thousands of people detained arbitrarily in Egypt solely for peacefully exercising their human rights or following grossly unfair trials, including mass and military trials.

Mohamed Baker and Alaa Abdel Fattah have been detained since 29 September 2019 pending investigations into charges of “joining a terrorist group”, “funding a terrorist group”, “disseminating false news undermining national security” and “us[ing] social media to commit a publishing offence” under Case No.1356/2019 of the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), a branch of the Public Prosecution specialized in investigating national security threats. The SSSP opened investigations into similar charges against them under new Case No. 1228/2021 as part of a strategy increasingly used by the authorities, referred to as “rotation”, to circumvent the two-year limit for pre-trial detention allowed under Egyptian law and indefinitely extend the detention of activists. The trial of Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed Baker in Case No. 1228/2021 started on 28 October 2021, together with another defendant: blogger and activist Mohamed Ibrahim Radwan “Oxygen”, who was also convicted on charges of “spreading false news” in relation to social media posts and sentenced to four years’ imprisonment. Proceedings before emergency courts are inherently unfair as their verdicts are not subject to appeal by a higher tribunal.

The defendants were also denied their right to adequate defence as their lawyers were prevented from communicating with them in private and photocopying the casefiles, indictments and verdicts. Their lawyers filed complaints to the office responsible for ratifying Emergency State Security Court (ESSC) verdicts, calling on the president to quash the verdict in accordance with Article 14 of the Emergency Law. On 3 January 2022, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ratified the verdict against all three. A document seen by Amnesty International indicated that the sentence commenced from the date of ratification, rather than the date of their arrests. Mohamed Baker’s lawyers filed a case in front of the State Council, the administrative court, for the 31 months he spent in pre-trial detention to be counted towards his sentence.

Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed Baker were held in inhumane conditions at the Tora Maximum Security 2 Prison, in Cairo until May 2022. Prison authorities held them in small, poorly ventilated cells and have denied them beds and mattresses. Unlike other prisoners, they were prohibited from exercising in the prison yard and were not allowed to use the prison library nor receive books or newspapers from outside prison at their own expense. The prison authorities also denied them adequate clothing, radios, watches, access to hot water and any personal belongings, including family photos. On 12 May, Alaa Abdel Fattah told his mother that he was beaten while handcuffed by the deputy prison warden at Tora Maximum Security 2 prison. On 18 May 2022 he was transferred to Wadi-el-Natroun Prison after significant public pressure. On 2 October, Mohamed Baker was transferred to Badr 1 Prison. His wife was allowed to visit him for the first time in two years without bars and he was allowed access to sunlight for the first time in three years.

Since the President’s reactivation of the Presidential Pardons Committee in April 2022, the Egyptian authorities released high-profile prisoners of conscience and hundreds of others held for political reasons. However, thousands remain arbitrarily detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights, or following grossly unfair trials, or without legal basis. Since 25 October, dozens have been arrested, questioned by prosecutors and ordered into pre-detention pending investigations in connection to their calls for peaceful protests during the UN Global Climate Change Conference (COP27), scheduled to take place in Sharm El-Sheik between 6 and 18 November.

On 23 November 2020, the Official Gazette published the decision of the Cairo Criminal Court to include Mohamed Baker and Alaa Abdel Fattah on the “terrorists list” for five years without any due process as part of case No. 1781/2019 of the SSSP. On 18 January 2022, the Court of Cassation rejected their final appeal against the decision. The effect of the decision includes a travel ban, an asset freeze and prohibition from engaging in political or civic work for five years.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic or English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 4 January 2023

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Alaa Abdel Fattah (he/him) and Mohamed Baker (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/5621/2022/en/>