

URGENT ACTION

FEARS FOR HUNGER STRIKER HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Egyptian-British prisoner of conscience and prominent activist Alaa Abdel Fattah is held incommunicado, amid the authorities' refusal to allow his family or lawyer to see or contact him. In his last letter to his family on 31 October, he announced escalating his prolonged hunger strike by stopping any calorie intake on 1 November and water consumption on 6 November. After days in agony waiting for a letter from him at the gates of Wadi al-Natrun prison, on 10 November, a security officer told his mother that he is undergoing a "medical intervention". He provided no further details about his location and wellbeing and instructed her to no longer come. On 10 November, security officials denied Alaa's lawyer access to see him despite a visit authorization by the public prosecution.

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: @Alisiofficial

Dear President,

*I am writing to express my deep concerns for the fate of arbitrarily detained Egyptian-British activist **Alaa Abdel Fattah** and urge you for his immediate release. For over 200 days, he has been consuming only 100 calories daily 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 1 November and stopping water consumption on 6 November. The authorities' have refused to either allow Alaa's family or lawyer to see or contact him or to provide detailed information about his health, fate and whereabouts. The authorities have barred any family contact since 31 October. Between 7-9 November, Laila Soueif - Alaa's mother - has been going to Wadi al-Natrun prison daily to deliver correspondence and collect a letter from her son and leaving without news. On 10 November, a security officer told her that a "medical intervention" had taken place with the knowledge of the judicial authorities but provided no further details and instructed her to no longer come to the prison. Security officers denied Alaa' lawyer access to him on 10 November, ignoring an authorization by the public prosecution issued on the evening of 9 November. Given the well-documented patterns on the denial of adequate healthcare in prison, I am concerned that medical decisions over Alaa's healthcare are not being made by independent medical professionals in compliance with medical ethics and free from coercion or interference by the authorities.*

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 Egyptian authorities are ultimately responsible for his life.

I urge you to release Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed Baker immediately and unconditionally, as they are detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights. In the meantime, the Egyptian authorities must immediately disclose information about Alaa's health and his whereabouts, and allow his family, lawyers and UK consular officials to immediately visit him and permit regular phone calls. The authorities must protect him from torture and other ill-treatment and urgently grant him access to adequate healthcare, at a facility of his family's choice where he can be treated by qualified medical professionals in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Alaa Abdel Fattah, a well-known political activist and government critic, has been repeatedly arrested in the past decade 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 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 and Mohamed 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. 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 from the date of their arrests.

Alaa and Mohamed 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 or 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 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 al-Natrun Prison after significant public pressure. On 2 October, Mohamed 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. Prison authorities banning them from any phone calls in prison are acting in contravention of Article 38 of Law 38 396/1956 on Prisons and Egypt’s obligations under international human rights law. Amnesty International has consistently documented the Egyptian authorities’ denial of adequate healthcare to prisoners and has raised concerns over the independence of medical staff in Egyptian prisons (who report to the Ministry of Interior). This includes concerns over interferences by prison wardens and security forces in prisoners’ medical assessments and in decisions over their healthcare, including delays or refusals to transfer critically ill prisoners to outside facilities for treatment. As such, there are strong grounds to believe that decisions over Alaa’s healthcare will not be made by independent medical professionals in compliance with medical ethics and free from coercion or interference by the authorities.

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), taking place in Sharm El-Sheik between 6 and 18 November. *Since the beginning of COP27, a chorus of voices have called* on the Egyptian authorities to release Alaa. On 8 November, expressing deep regret at his ongoing detention, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, called for his immediate release and urged the authorities to provide him with the necessary healthcare.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 5 January 2022

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

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/6184/2022/en/