

URGENT ACTION

PROMINENT ACTIVIST IN CRITICAL CONDITION

Egyptian-British prisoner of conscience and prominent activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, who has spent most of the last nine years arbitrarily detained, is in critical condition after more than seven months of hunger strike. His family raised concerns about his physical and mental state, after he told them during a visit on 17 November about his ordeal since he started a water strike on 6 November, which involved self-harm, being restrained by security officials, and being fed intravenously. 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: @AIsisiOfficial

Dear President,

*I am writing to you to express my deep concerns regarding the ongoing arbitrarily detention of Egyptian-British activist **Alaa Abdel Fattah** and urge you to ensure his immediate and unconditional release. His physical and mental health gravely deteriorated after he started a hunger strike in April 2022 to protest his unjust imprisonment and denial of consular visits, escalating it to a water strike on 6 November, the first day of the UN Global Climate Change Conference (COP27). The Egyptian authorities held him incommunicado for two weeks, barring all visits and written correspondence. Security forces prevented his lawyer from seeing him on three occasions between 10 and 14 November ignoring authorizations from the public prosecution. His relatives were finally allowed a visit, through a glass window on 17 November and reported that he was "exhausted, weak and vulnerable". He recounted a disturbing episode which took place on 8 November and involved prison officials restraining him after he became increasingly distressed, banged his head against the wall and threatened to commit suicide due to the prison authorities' refusal to record his hunger and water strike. The following day, 9 November, he again banged his head against the wall to compel the authorities to take action. The following day, an investigator from the prosecution questioned him and recorded his hunger strike and demands. On 11 November, he lost consciousness in the shower, and when he regained it, he was held by a cellmate, surrounded by a large crowd and had a tube inserted into his body. Following this near-death experience, he decided not to resume his hunger strike immediately, but vowed to continue if "there continues to be no real movement on his case".*

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 allow lawyers and UK consular officials to immediately visit him. 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.

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 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 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 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 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 al-Natrun 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. Prison authorities banned them from any phone calls in contravention to Egypt’s obligations under international human rights law and of Article 38 of Law 38 396/1956 on Prisons. 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 Abdel Fattah’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 exercising their human rights, or following grossly unfair trials, or without legal basis. During the UN Global Climate Change Conference, held in Egypt between 6 and 18 November, 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: 16 January 2022

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/mde12/6195/2022/en/>