

URGENT ACTION

EGYPT CONTINUES TO ARREST GOVERNMENT CRITICS

On 16 November, security agents in plain clothes arrested Egyptian social media figure Islam al-Refaei. The Egyptian authorities ordered him to be detained on the trumped-up charge of “belonging to a banned group”. On 13 December, the Supreme State Security Prosecution ordered the renewal of Islam al-Refaei’s detention for 15 more days, pending investigation for “belonging to a banned group”, and added six more individuals to the case.

Islam al-Refaei, known on Twitter as “5orm” (an Arabic word meaning “hole”), is a popular social media figure in Egypt, best known for his sarcastic posts about politics, art and media. According to Islam al-Refaei’s family and lawyers, on the evening of 16 November, security agents in plain clothes lured Islam al-Refaei to a meeting in downtown Cairo on the pretext of discussing a website he had allegedly designed. Police officers then took Islam al-Refaei to Abdeen police station, near to where he had met the plain-clothes agents. His phone was reported as switched off after the meeting, leaving his friends unable to contact him. On 18 November, when his friends and family went to Abdeen police station to report him missing, the police denied knowledge of Islam al-Refaei’s whereabouts. His family and friends only became aware of his whereabouts after a lawyer reported that he saw him being questioned by the state security prosecutor in Abdeen police station.

The prosecution originally ordered his detention for 15 days pending an investigation into the charge of him “joining a banned group” (namely the Muslim Brotherhood). According to Islam al-Refaei’s lawyers, the detention order relied only on information from the National Security Agency. On 13 December, the Supreme State Security Prosecution ordered the renewal of Islam al-Refaei’s detention for another 15 days. Islam al-Refaei is a well-known secular activist on Egyptian social media and has previously drawn criticism for his posts that challenge religious and cultural norms in Egypt.

On 7 December, security forces arrested two journalists, **Hossam el-Swefy** and **Ahmed Abdel Aziz**. Both were arrested during a peaceful demonstration in front of the premises of the Journalists’ Syndicate in downtown Cairo to protest against US President Donald Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The prosecutor has decided to pursue the case against the two journalists and that against Islam al-Refaei’s as one case and added four more individuals to it. The four other individuals were arrested on two separate occasions.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English, or your own language urging the Egyptian authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Islam al-Refaei, Hossam el-Swefy and Ahmed Abdel Aziz, as they are imprisoned solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression or peaceful assembly;
- Ensure that, while detained, the three men have all their due process rights upheld, including access to legal representation and the right to challenge the lawfulness of their detention;
- Cease the practice of prolonged and arbitrary pre-trial detention.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 JANUARY 2018 TO:

Public Prosecutor

Nabil Sadek
Office of the Public Prosecutor, Dar al-Qada al-Ali, Down Town
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +20225774716
Salutation: Dear Counsellor

President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2391 1441
Email: p.spokesman@op.gov.eg
Twitter: @AlsisiOfficial
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Human Rights
Laila Bahaa Eldin
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche el-Nile, Cairo, Egypt.
Fax: +202 2574 9713
Email: contact.us@mfa.gov.eg
Twitter: @MfaEgypt

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR NASSER AHMED KAMEL ALI, Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 26 South Street W1K 1DW, 020 7499 3304/2401, Fax 020 7491 1542, eg.emb_london@mfa.gov.eg and etembuk@hotmail.com

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Egyptian authorities regularly arrest and prosecute individuals for their social media posts. Between April and September 2017, the Egyptian authorities arrested at least 240 people from opposition parties and political youth groups in 17 cities in relation to comments they posted that were critical of the Egyptian President. For example, a court in Zagazig, to the north east of the Egyptian capital, sentenced Coptic Christian student Andrew Saleeb, a government critic who had posted comments criticizing President Abdelfatah el-Sisi, to five years in prison for a trumped up charge of “supporting terrorism, a reference in this case to the Muslim Brotherhood. The court ruled that Andrew’s actions fell under Article 28 of Law 94, which states that “any person who promotes or prepares to promote, directly or indirectly, the commission of a terrorist crime...whether through writing, speech, or any other medium...shall be imprisoned for five years.” They based the ruling on his Facebook posts and the fliers they found that in his home that were calling for protesting against the recent currency devaluation.

Law 94/2015, known as the counter-terrorism law, expands the powers of the security forces and the Public Prosecution to hold individuals in detention without charge or trial. The powers allow for prolonged periods of pre-trial detention in circumstances that go beyond what is allowed by the Egyptian Constitution and international human rights law and standards. The current law removes the right of a detainee to be brought promptly before a judge – a right which cannot be restricted even in times of emergency – increasing the risk of arbitrary detention. As a result, since July 2013, Egyptian authorities have held thousands in pre-trial detention.

Further information on UA: 277/17 Index: MDE 12/7620/2017 Issue Date: 20 December 2017