

URGENT ACTION

30 JUNE SET AS DATE OF VERDICT FOR SHAWKAN

The Cairo Criminal Court has set 30 June as the date for issuing the verdict in the Rabaa Dispersal case against journalist and prisoner of conscience Mahmoud Abu Zeid “Shawkan” and 738 other defendants. The verdict will come after Shawkan has been held in pre-trial detention for 1781 days.

On 29 May, the Cairo Criminal Court announced the closing of defence arguments and set the 30 June as the date for issuing its verdict against journalist and prisoner of conscience **Mahmoud Abu Zeid, known as “Shawkan”** and 738 other defendants in the case. Shawkan is facing the death penalty, after the prosecutor in the case called for sentencing all defendants, including Shawkan, to death.

The 30-year-old photojournalist is a defendant in a mass trial along with 738 others, including senior leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Public Prosecutor charged him with 24 offences, including murder. Shawkan was carrying out his duties as a photojournalist during the demonstration and the prosecution did not present any evidence that he was guilty of murder or any of the other violence-related charges. In addition, Shawkan is being charged for “illegal gathering”, which should not be a crime in accordance with Egyptian international and constitutional obligations to guarantee the right to peaceful assembly. Amnesty International considers Mahmoud Abu Zeid a prisoner of conscience.

Shawkan has been in pre-trial detention since the dispersal of Rabaa sit-in on 14 August 2013, in violation of Egyptian law, which establishes a maximum two-year limit on pre-trial detention. Shawkan’s brother told Amnesty: “It is unfair for a journalist to be imprisoned all of that time merely for doing his work. Why would he be imprisoned in pre-trial detention for over four years? This is punitive, not pre-trial detention.”

Please write immediately in Arabic, English, or your own language:

- Urging the Egyptian authorities to drop all charges against Mahmoud Abu Zeid, and to release him immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for doing his journalistic work;
- Calling on them to protect Mahmoud Abu Zeid from torture and other ill-treatment, pending his release, and provide him with any healthcare he may require;
- Calling on them to order an independent and effective investigation into allegations that he has been tortured or otherwise ill-treated while in custody, and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 JUNE 2018 TO:

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

Interior Minister
Magdy Abdel Ghaffar
Ministry of Interior
Fifth Settlement, New Cairo
Egypt
Fax: +202 2794 5529
Email: center@moi.gov.eg
Twitter: @moiegy
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign
Affairs for Human Rights
Ahmed Ihab Gamal Eldin
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Cairo
Arab Republic of 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. This is the fourteenth update of UA 243/14. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/6903/2017/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

After Mohamed Morsi was ousted on 3 July 2013, Mahmoud Abu Zeid began taking photos of a large sit-in staged by the former president's supporters in Rabaa al-Adawiya Square, Nasr City, in the capital, Cairo. Egyptian security forces used excessive, including lethal, force to disperse the sit-in on 14 August, killing hundreds of people. In the ensuing violence, eight members of the security forces also died. Police forces arrested Shawkan on 14 August 2013 while he was on assignment for London-based photo agency Demotix. They also arrested two foreign journalists along with him, but they released the two foreign journalists on the same day. Demotix told the Public Prosecutor's Office that Shawkan was on assignment for them, but Egyptian authorities continued to detain him.

Shawkan told Amnesty International that police and army officers ill-treated him during his first day under arrest and on 17 August 2013, when he was transferred from an overcrowded cell at a police station in Cairo to the capital's Abu Zaabal Prison. According to his letter, published by Amnesty International on 5 April, officers punched, kicked him and beat him with batons. They also kept him in a parked truck for eight hours, although the temperature was above 30 degrees centigrade, without food, water, or fresh air, when they arrived Abu Zaabal Prison. In the letter, he described his indefinite detention as "psychologically unbearable". 2015. See Shawkan 's letter: *600 days in jail for taking pictures: A letter from an Egyptian prison*, 5 April 2015 (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/04/600-days-in-jail-for-taking-pictures/>). He was transferred to Cairo's Tora Prison Complex in December 2013, where he is still held.

Shawkan's family told Amnesty International that he was diagnosed with Hepatitis C before his arrest on 14 August 2013 and that his health is deteriorating in prison. However, on 20 May 2017, the Public prosecutor presented the Forensic Medical Authority report on Shawkan's health condition to the Cairo criminal court. The report claimed that Shawkan is not suffering from any disease, and that he is in "very good" health. In the same session, the judge ordered an investigation into allegations made by several detainees, including Shawkan, that the prison administration ill-treated them through withholding medicine and toiletries in addition to physically assaulting them. So far, the court did not report back on the investigation.

The UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention released an opinion on 21 October 2016 calling on the Egyptian authorities to "immediately release" Shawkan and "accord him an enforceable right to reparation". It considers the arrest of Shawkan and the deprivation of his liberty to be arbitrary and in violation of rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Shawkan's court hearings have been adjourned by the court for over 50 times, mainly as a result of the number of people on trial. Mass trials of this nature are incompatible with the right to a fair trial. Egyptian authorities have repeatedly denied Shawkan's lawyers' access to key documents related to the case.

Egypt is a state party to the ICCPR, Article 9 of which prohibits arbitrary detention. Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of expression - that is, the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas. Article 14 guarantees the right of everyone to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. The article further guarantees the rights of everyone facing criminal charges to be informed promptly of the nature and cause of the charges against them, the right to have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of their defence, the right to be tried in their presence, and the right to examine, or have examined, the witnesses against them.