

# North Africa Region Newsletter January 2019

## Welcome

Read about how you can take action for Aser Mohamed, Gulio Regini and Ali Aarrass; read an update on Shawkan and good news about your work on arbitrary restrictions on movement in Tunisia and work on Azza Soliman. Would your group like to work on the Egyptian case of Hanan Badr el-Din? See page 4 for more details. Wishing you all a very Happy New Year and happy campaigning from Winter into Spring.

## Egypt

### **Failure to Protect the Rights of Children**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, to commemorate World Children's Day, Amnesty released a joint statement with the Egyptian Front for Human Rights highlighting three areas where the Egyptian government has systemically failed to protect the rights of children arrested and held in detention.



As a signatory party to the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Egyptian government has a duty to ensure the wellbeing of its children particularly to guarantee their protection from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In addition, Egyptian law outlines further protections and treatment for children arrested and held in detention.

However, despite these protections on both a national and international level the authorities have denied these for at least 13 children whose families Amnesty interviewed for the report. According to the findings, Egyptian security forces have forcibly disappeared 12 children and tortured at least six since 2015. The report further highlights a consistent failure to separate children from adults held in detention and an additional failing to prosecute and sentence children separately from adults, leading to at least three children being sentenced to death.

### **Aser Mohamed**

The report outlines the horrifically unfair trials to which the children have been subjected, despite prosecutors knowing the relied upon "confessions" were obtained utilizing torture, and without the presence of lawyers. This will not be a surprise to those familiar with the ongoing Amnesty case of Aser Mohamed, who at 14 was arrested in his family home and forcibly disappeared for 34 days. Aser was accused of belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, an illegal group in Egypt, and of involvement in an attack on a hotel. After Aser's denial of the charges at the trial, the prosecutor said: *"it seems that you want to go back to the electric shocks again."* A dreadful statement, indicating his knowledge of the presence of torture.

Aser's case, and those like it, are in direct violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Egyptian law, however, nearly three years after his initial detention Aser is still on trial for his crimes and is due back in court on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January.

Two days after the release of Amnesty's report, the Egyptian government issued a blistering statement in which it denied the findings stating they were "not based on well-grounded sources" and did not provide "reliable evidence." While not unexpected, it is disappointing that the authorities would choose to ignore the evidence of misconduct rather than investigate. Amnesty has since re-

affirmed its findings and continues to urge the authorities to investigate the claims rather than accusing Amnesty of launching a “politicised smear campaign.”

Amnesty will continue to call for the Egyptian authorities to ensure the rights of children are protected at all times and the use of torture is halted for all in Egypt. The full statement can be found using the following link: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1294282018ENGLISH.pdf>.

See pages 7&8 for details of letters you can send to the Egyptian authorities calling for the release of Aser.

Any groups wishing to campaign on behalf of Aser Mohamed can contact Jamie Wheeler-Roberts. Contact details can be found at the end of the ezine.

## **Tunisia**

### **Inheritance rights in Tunisia**

Tunisian inheritance law provides that any son inherits twice as much as daughters; but it is common practice for daughters to be pressured into giving up their small share entirely.

In August 2018 in a speech marking the National Day of Women in Tunisia, the President renewed his call for equal inheritance rights: *"I propose equality inheritance to become law"*, President Beji Caid Essebsi said in a speech, although he also left an opening for exceptions based on religion. Equality Now said that *"While this is welcome progress for Tunisian women fighting for equality, parliament now needs to decide on a bill and should give equal rights to women regardless of religion or any status."*

### **Some good news regarding arbitrary restrictions on movement in Tunisia**

Thank you to all of you who took action in October/ November in response to the report, "They Never Tell Me Why" - Arbitrary Restrictions on Movement in Tunisia. The Amnesty office in Tunis are still pushing for concrete change but the Ministry of the Interior are now saying that they will look at amending the border control procedures. What you did really helped. Thank you again!

## **Case Updates**

### **Waiting for Shawkan's release**

The wheels of injustice can grind slowly in Egypt. Shawkan was sentenced on 8 September 2018 to 5 years in jail, a term he had already served. So he was due for immediate release, and his lawyer expected him to be released in October.

As the weeks passed, news came out that a number of defendants in the case were being held for an additional six months. The new target date for his release is 19 February. He will then be subject to five years of probation, including daily reporting to a police station.

Fingers crossed, we look forward to celebrating with you.

## Truth for Giulio Regeni

Two anniversaries in the campaign for Truth for Giulio are coming up soon. On the evening of Friday 25 January, it will be three years since Giulio Regeni, an Italian PhD student at Cambridge doing field work in Egypt, was subjected to enforced disappearance in Cairo. The Cambridge City Group is organising a vigil in the centre of Cambridge to mark the exact time of his disappearance.

Saturday 2 February will mark three years since the discovery of Giulio's body outside Cairo. On that day, a vigil will be held at the Egyptian Embassy in London. A further event, a seminar to discuss the implications of his murder, will be held on Monday 4 February in Cambridge.

The campaign for Truth for Giulio is just that: an insistence by Giulio Regeni's family, and everyone else concerned with justice and freedom of speech, that this atrocity must be fully investigated, and the perpetrators brought to trial. Despite the current Italian government's position that the investigation into the murder of one of its own citizens is not a matter in the national interest, the Italian judiciary continues to try to push the case forward. At the end of November, Italian prosecutors, apparently frustrated by the lack of any progress in the case in Egypt, publicly named several Egyptian security agents as suspects in his death ( <https://tinyurl.com/y7rrzpiw> ).

Please support this crucial campaign by coming along to one or more of the three anniversary events:

- Friday evening, 25 January: vigil in Cambridge city centre, outside Great St Mary's Church, exact location and time to be confirmed
- Saturday 2 February, 12 noon - 1:00 PM: vigil at the Egyptian Embassy, 26 South Street, London W1K 1DW
- Monday 4 February, 12 noon - 2:00 PM: location to be confirmed: seminar in Cambridge on Giulio Regeni, sponsored by Cambridge City Amnesty Group, Cambridge University Amnesty, and Cambridge University and College Union.

Please contact: Sue Woodsford, Chair, Cambridge City Group: [sue.woodsford@ntlworld.com](mailto:sue.woodsford@ntlworld.com) for updates on the two events in Cambridge, and Hugh Sandeman: [hugh.sandeman@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:hugh.sandeman@amnesty.org.uk) for details of the embassy vigil in London.

## Ali Arrass

Thank you to many of you for continuing to send solidarity messages to Ali Arrass (which is what we are asked to do at the moment). West Glasgow group have sent Ali postcards, Chester group have sent a notebook and pen, the Isle of Wight group football memorabilia and at the Coordinator's Conference and elsewhere I filled a 2019 calendar with messages to Ali. Thank you too to those who have made personal donations to Farida (Ali's sister) towards Ali's outstanding legal fees.

An email, received by the West Glasgow group from Farida, stated:

*Ali receives your letters and thanks you. It does him a lot of good to be supported. That people so far are thinking of him.*

*I do not know how to thank you all. Your kindness touches us deeply.*

*Infinitely thank you.*

*Farida Arrass*

The photo on the right shows Ali and Farida as children when they were 11 and 8 respectively. Farida says *"Ali was always my protector. With ups and downs, arguing over and over, but if a third party bothered me, he was there to look after me."* Farida, during Ali's long years in prison in later life, has been his protector in her fight for justice for Ali.



Please continue to send Ali solidarity messages. His address is - Numero d'ecrou 930, Prison Locale de Tifelt 11, Tifelt, Morocco.

For further information contact Bev whose contact details are at the end of this ezine.

## **New Egyptian IAR Case**

### **Introducing Hanan Badr el-Din**

Like many human rights defenders, Hanan Badr el-Din, an Egyptian woman and medical worker, did not choose to risk her life and freedom by taking up the cause of people subjected in Egypt to enforced disappearances. The task was forced upon her, by the disappearance on 27 July 2013 of her own husband, Khaled Ezz el-Din.



On that day, Hanan Badr el-Din caught a glimpse of her husband in a TV report of a field clinic following a day of demonstrations. She went to the clinic but he had gone. She looked for him in police stations, prisons, hospitals and morgues, but from the moment of his disappearance, she was unable to find any further information of what had happened to him.

In the course of her enquiries, Hanan Badr el-Din heard about other cases of enforced disappearances in Egypt. In early 2014, she helped to found the Families of the Forcibly Disappeared Association. They began their work by searching for news of people who had disappeared, and then broadened their activities in 2015 to campaigning publicly for the government to tell the truth about the use of enforced disappearances as a means of repression and intimidation. This is a policy Amnesty has researched in great detail, drawing on the work of a number of civil society organisations in Egypt (including in the 2016 report "Officially You Do Not Exist": <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/4368/2016/en/> ).

On 6 May 2017, Hanan Badr el-Din was visiting someone in prison who had previously been subjected to enforced disappearance, when she was arrested and investigated on the possible charge of belonging to a banned group. Her detention has been continually renewed since then.

Amnesty has campaigned widely for the immediate release of Hanan Badr el-Din, on the basis that she is a prisoner of conscience. Hanan was part of the worldwide Write for Rights campaign in 2017, and Amnesty Sections including in the US, Canada, Austria, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands have campaigned on her behalf. In the UK, Hanan was not part of Write for Rights (we were focusing on Azza Soliman), but there have been three Urgent Actions in her support within AIUK since her detention, which many of you helped with (most recently in August, <https://tinyurl.com/y93adwka> ).

Outside Amnesty, organisations including Frontline Defenders, EuroMed Rights and the French FIDH are campaigning for her freedom.

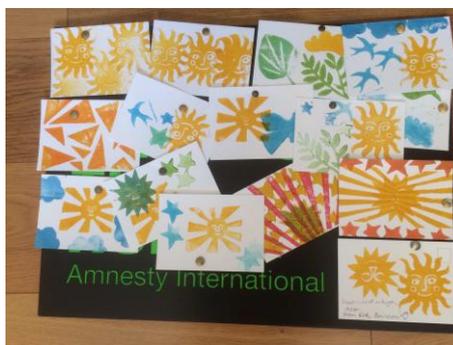
Would you like to join in? We are hoping that Shawkan will be released from jail in February (see page 2). If he does emerge, our team will have the capacity to take on another case. To do that, we'll need to be sure that at least a few local groups are interested in adopting this case to work on for a couple of years or so.

If you'd like to consider this, please contact Hugh at [hugh.sandeman@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:hugh.sandeman@amnesty.org.uk) or on 07785 502 759

## **Groups:**

### **Campaigning for Azza Soliman**

Local groups have been busy since the last ezine finding different ways of highlighting the situation of Egyptian human rights lawyer, Azza Soliman among the wider public. Azza has been targeted by the Egyptian authorities for defending victims of torture, domestic abuse and rape. Her assets have been frozen, she is banned from travel and is under threat of being detained.



Bognor and Chichester group had a stall at Chichester Cathedral as part of an event to mark International Peace Day. The Amnesty International Candle, which has been in place at the Cathedral for 10 years, formed part of the Peace Trail. Visitors signed beautiful postcards printed by the local community and these have been sent to Azza with a letter thanking her for speaking up for those who have no voice.

Exeter group took part in the Women of the World festival where they spoke about Azza at a session on international activism. There were many festival goers who had come to learn about and support other women. During the weekend all the action cards calling for the charges against her to be dropped had been signed and were sent on to the Egyptian authorities.



Bodnant Garden in north Wales was the venue for Colwyn Bay's action for Azza in September. As part of a celebration of a local suffragist, Laura McClaren who lived at Bodnant, they highlighted the Amnesty suffragette map and modernday human rights defenders across the world. There were action cards for Azza available to sign and visitors coloured in paper doves and butterflies which will be sent to her with messages of support.

Thank you to all our groups who have been working so hard in their letter writing groups, meetings and campaign events. We would love to come and meet you and support your events. Please contact us and tell us how we can help.

## Andrea Says Hello

### News of a previous member of our Country Coordinator team



Some of you will remember Andrea Maurano who worked in the North Africa team for many years on both Algeria and Morocco. Andrea now lives in Boston, USA where he works for Samsung (doing research on batteries). Bev met up with Andrea and his partner, Roberta for dinner on a trip to New England in the Autumn. Andrea says "hello" to all his Amnesty friends who he said are the best people he has ever met (except Roberta of course). He hopes to move closer to these shores in the future. The Amnesty family will always welcome him with open arms!

## Contact the North Africa Regional Team

### **Tunisia**

Beverley Foulkes-Jones

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### **Algeria and Libya**

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### **Egypt**

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Find us on Twitter:

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Ministry of the Interior  
Minister Magdy Abdel Ghaffar  
Fifth Settlement  
New Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

**Your Excellency:**

**Case of Aser Mohamed**

I urge you to immediately release Aser Mohamed. On 12 January 2016 NSA officers detained Aser (who was 14 years old at the time) for 34 days. He was tortured into “confessing” the crimes with which he is charged. Aser is facing trial using these confessions extracted under torture and faces 15 years in prison.

As a signatory party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child Egypt has an obligation to ensure all of its children are free from torture. This is also enshrined in the Egyptian constitution under Article 80.

We strongly implore the authorities to drop the charges against Aser and to release him.

Yours respectfully,

Office of the President  
Al Ittihadia Palace  
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

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