

Newsletter: June 2021

Bognor Regis, Chichester & District Group



Dates for your diary	15/06/2021 - 21/06/2021: Refugee Week Saturday 19/06/2021: National Conference & AGM Saturday 07/07/2021: Human Rights in the UK online event
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Dear writers

In view of the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt and the urgent need for action on behalf of several of our long standing cases, we are sending a special mailing outlining specific actions to be taken in June. Please support these appeals if you possibly can.

Other events

15/06/2021 - 21/06/2021: Refugee Week. The theme of this year's Refugee Week is "We cannot walk alone":

<https://refugeeweek.org.uk/about/>

- Local event: **Tears of Joy exhibition and workshop.** To mark Refugee Week, Article12Arts, in collaboration with Sanctuary in Chichester, are running a week-long exhibition in Chichester Cathedral <https://festivalofchichester.co.uk/event/tears-of-joy/> Article12arts is for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young refugees to express themselves and enjoy being creative.
- A Seat at the Table: Food Festival organised by Freedom from Torture. Join online to celebrate the power of food to bring people together with A Seat at the Table. <https://foodfestival.freedomfromtorture.org/>

Saturday 17/07/2021 "Human Rights in the UK" online by London Amnesty - contact me for details (01243) 823016.

Carry on writing!

Bob Dewick, Amnesty

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Amnesty action: campaigns & letter-writing

Egypt: human rights situation and actions

In view of the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt and the urgent need for action on behalf of several of our long standing cases, we are sending a special mailing outlining specific actions to be taken in June. Please support these appeals if you possibly can. They include:

- presentation by Azza Soliman outlining the current issues and how to help
- urgent action on behalf of human rights lawyer, Mohamed el-Baqer and activist, Alaa Abdel Fattah
- **12 June** new action on the second anniversary of the arrest of Ibrahim Ezz El-Din
- **26 June** UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture action on behalf of Aser Mohamed

Summary of the online presentation by Azza Soliman on the current Human Rights situation in Egypt, 28 May 2021

Those of us who have been campaigning on behalf of Human Rights Defender, Azza Soliman, will know that it is now 5 years since the Egyptian government imposed a travel ban and froze the assets of Azza and many other human right defenders in Egypt under the notorious Case 173 ruling. This attempt to restrict the activities of a wide range of NGOs in Egypt is a clear indication that, as Azza herself said, the security services 'have all the power.'



Current situation

Currently, the situation is becoming increasingly difficult for Azza and her organisation CEWLA (Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance) in their work to support women who are victims of domestic abuse and trafficking, her fight for equality for women in Egyptian society, rights of children born out of wedlock, amending family law and campaigning for civil laws to protect the human rights of all Egyptians. Under the new laws it is becoming virtually impossible for such organisations to function because of restrictions on funding and refusal of permission for research projects. However, despite her own lack of freedom, invasion of her privacy, unfounded accusations of 'spying' in the media and fears for the safety of her family, Azza is still determined to carry on fighting for justice.

Azaa spoke very movingly of the thousands of messages of support and solidarity from Amnesty members around the world and how they have brought her comfort. She vows she will not be silenced and commented that the widespread use of social media as a forum for women to express their views has been very valuable source of hope for the future.

She and other HRDs are currently about to issue a joint statement calling on the Egyptian government

- to release of political prisoners and peaceful activists
- to lift the travel ban and freeze on assets of HRDs
- to reform family and personal laws
- to cancel the current emergency law
- to amend the Egyptian constitution
- to suspend executions

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A copy of this statement will be sent to Amnesty members to sign in support.

What further support is needed?

Azza emphasised that all support is very welcome but she highlighted, in particular, the need

- to keep the Case 173 in the public view and to encourage the UK Government to raise the issue with the Egyptian authorities
- to encourage EU and other bodies who wish to fund NGOs in Egypt to put pressure on the government to lift restrictions
- to urge UN Special Rapporteurs to investigate human rights violations
- to put pressure on governments such as US/Russia which provide military aid to use their influence
- to engage the interest of high profile celebrities to highlight cases
- to address direct appeals to President al-Sisi and the Public Prosecutor
- to organise events such as vigils to highlight cases and issues and to engage public support

She concluded her talk with thanks and gratitude for support received, sending hugs and kisses to all her friends and supporters in the UK, particularly those in Oxford where she lived 2015-16.

Those who heard her speak could not fail to be moved by her emotional words about the suffering experienced by colleagues and friends who have been ill treated while in prison; the devastating impact state repression has had on her family, causing her to be separated from her son who has been forced to study and live abroad for his own safety, and, above all, her own admission of the heavy price she herself has paid by continuing to fight for justice. As she concluded tearfully: 'I miss freedom.'

Action: please see below details of three actions you can take to help.

Urgent action appeal on behalf of Mohamed El-Baqer and Alaa Abdel Fattah

Two of the people Azza spoke about specifically were her friend, human rights lawyer Mohamed El-Baqer and activist Alaa Abdel Fattah. She was clearly very distressed by reports of the cruel and degrading treatment they are suffering in detention deprived of beds, mattresses, warm clothing, exercise, family visits, parcels and letters and denied Covid 10 vaccinations and adequate health care.

Please support the urgent action appeal for their release and, pending their release, a move to decent accommodation and appropriate health care. You can support this appeal by sending the attached model letter as an email message to Public Prosecutor Hamada al-Sawi and President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. *Please see below for details.

12 June new action on the second anniversary of the arrest of Ibrahim Ezz El-Din

Two years after his arrest following his enforced disappearance, housing right researcher and activist Ibrahim Ezz El-Din, is still being held in prison although there is no evidence against him. In January 2021 he was cleared for release but then new charges were brought against



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him ('recycling') and he was returned to prison. He is in poor physical and mental health, for which he is denied treatment. He has twice attempted suicide.

Please send this email appeal to President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi p.spokesman@op.gov.eg copied to the Egyptian Ambassador egtamboff@gmail.com on 12 June

Dear President

I am very distressed to learn that housing activist, Ibrahim Ezz El Din, is still in detention two years after his arrest in June 2021, although he was cleared for release in January 2021. I am very concerned about his physical and mental health for which he has been denied treatment. I call upon you to order his immediate and unconditional release and, pending release, to allow him access to family, lawyers and appropriate health care.

Yours sincerely

Please see below for appeal on behalf of Aser Mohamed.

26 June new action to mark United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on behalf of Aser Mohamed

Aged 14 when he was arrested in January 2016, Aser was sentenced to 10 years in prison on the basis of evidence extorted under torture. He is currently awaiting the result of an appeal.

It is thought that he has already contracted Covid 19 but none of the prisoners received any medical treatment. His sister reported serious concerns for his health after her last visit.

On 26 June, we have been asked, as a group, to send flowers to the Egyptian Ambassador, HE Tarek Ahmed Ibrahim Adel, with the message:



Remembering Aser Mohamed on UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, sentenced to 10 years in prison on the basis of evidence obtained under torture when he was a child.'

Please also send your own similar messages and/or the attached letter to President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to support this action. * please see below for template

I realise that I am asking a great deal this month, but I am sure that those of you who heard Azza Soliman's very moving and inspirational presentation would understand how important international support is in motivating human rights defenders and strengthening them in their struggles for freedom. I should be very grateful for any time you could spare to take action on these cases and, if you can let me know (very briefly) when you have responded it is very helpful.

Thanks to all of you for your support.

Margaret Robertson

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Action: Appeal for the release of Mohamed el-Baqer and Alaa Abdel Fattah June 2021

To: Public Prosecutor Hamada al-Sawi

m.office@ppo.gov.eg

Copied to HE Tarek Ahmed

egtamboff@gmail.com

Dear Counsellor

I am writing to express my grave concern about the arbitrary detention of human rights lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer and activist Alaa Abdel Fattah. Both men have been held in pre-trial detention since October 2019, solely for their peaceful exercise of human rights.

I am particularly disturbed to learn of the harsh and inhumane conditions they are suffering at Tora Maximum Security Prison 2 in Cairo. They share a very cramped and poorly ventilated cell with two other prisoners, sleeping on the floor because they have been denied beds and mattresses. Unlike other prisoners, they are not allowed to exercise in the prison yard nor to use the prison library or receive books or newspapers at their own expense. They have also been forbidden adequate clothing, radios, watches, access to hot water and any personal belongings, including family photos. In view of this appalling treatment, it is not surprising to learn that they are in poor mental and physical health.

Their families are particularly concerned that they have been denied access to the Covid 19 vaccination programme. In addition to the complaints made by their families about the cruel and unhealthy conditions, the Egyptian Initiative for Human Rights filed a lawsuit on 10 May 2021 condemning the Egyptian government's failure to vaccinate prisoners. A similar lawsuit was launched by Alaa Abdel Fattah's lawyer on his behalf.

I urge you to release Mohamed el-Baqer and Alaa Abdel Fattah immediately and unconditionally and to drop all charges against them. Pending their release, I call upon you to ensure that they are given access to vaccination and held in conditions which meet international standards of care including adequate accommodation, bedding, warmth, outdoor exercise and medical treatment and that they are not subjected to any further torture or ill treatment.

Yours sincerely

Action for Aser Mohamed

To : President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

p.spokesman@op.gov.eg

cc; HE Tarek Ahmed Ibrahim Adel

egtamboff@gmail.com

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President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi,
Office of the President,
Al Ittihadia Palace,
Cairo,
Arab Republic of Egypt

Your Excellency,

The case of Aser Mohamed

The United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture is on 26 June. This is an international observance held annually on the above date to speak out against the crime of torture and to honour and support victims and survivors throughout the world.

I understand that the sentence imposed on Aser Mohamed is soon to be reviewed by the Court of Cassation (the application was made around October 2019).

I believe that Aser Mohamed has been unjustly sentenced to 10 years in prison on the basis of evidence obtained under torture when he was a child. I call on the Egyptian authorities to quash Aser's conviction and to release him immediately. I further, appeal to you to order an investigation into his enforced disappearance (for some 34 days) when he was just 14 years of age and into allegations of torture.

Pending his release, Aser should be provided with the means to communicate with his family and lawyers and the authorities should take measures to protect Aser's health. Aser suffers from a chronic allergy that causes respiratory difficulties which puts him at particular risk of Covid 19 according to the World Health Organisation's list of vulnerable groups.

I look forward to hearing from you further.

Yours sincerely

C.c
HE Tarek Ahmed Ibrahim Adel
Ambassador
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt
26 South Street
London
W1K 1DW