

URGENT ACTION

HEALTH CONCERNS FOR ACTIVIST AND LAWYER

On 15 April 2020, the lawyers of activist Alaa Abdel Fattah – who has been unlawfully detained since September 2019 – learnt that he is on hunger strike at Tora Maximum Security Prison 2. The potential for an outbreak of COVID-19 in the prison only heightens concerns for his health, as well as that of human rights lawyer, Mohamed al-Baqer, who has underlying health conditions that could make him more vulnerable.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Public Prosecutor Hamada al-Sawi

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Dear Counsellor,

On 10 March 2020, the Egyptian authorities suspended all prison visits as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The authorities failed to introduce regular alternative means of communications between detainees and their families and lawyers such as bi-monthly phone calls as prescribed in Egyptian law.

Alaa Abdel Fattah's last family prison visit was on 4 March 2020. His family is concerned for his health and wellbeing as has no confirmation whether he received the sanitizers and the hygiene products they sent him every week since the suspension of prison visits and whether he has access to information on measures he could take to protect himself from a potential outbreak of COVID-19. On 15 April 2020, Alaa Abdel Fattah's lawyers were informed by the Maadi prosecution that he went on hunger strike. The lawyers were not provided with information regarding when the hunger strike started or reasons behind it. The hunger strike could weaken Alaa's immune system and potentially put him at higher risk if he contracts COVID-19.

Mohamed el-Baqer, also detained in Tora Maximum Security Prison 2, was last visited by his family on 7 March 2020. On 18 April 2020, the prison authorities allowed his family to send him food, vitamins and a letter after refusing to accept their package a week earlier. The family also received a letter from him. Mohamed el-Baqer reportedly suffers from a number of health conditions including asthma, chest pain, back and lumbar vertebra pain and kidney problems, some of which are included on the World Health Organisation's list of vulnerable groups in relation to COVID-19. The well-documented overcrowded and unsanitary detention conditions in Egyptian prisons present an increased risk of the spread of infectious diseases.

I therefore ask you to release Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed el-Baqer immediately and drop the charges on which they are being investigated, as they are detained in relation to the peaceful exercise of their rights. Pending their release we call on you to ensure they have access to adequate healthcare and means to communicate with their families and lawyers. I finally urge the Egyptian authorities to immediately release all those detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and take measures to protect the health of all prisoners amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The detention of Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed el-Baqer came amid the largest arrest campaign since President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power in 2014. On 20 and 21 September 2019, scattered protests broke across Egyptian cities, calling on President al-Sisi to resign. The protests are believed to have been sparked by corruption allegations shared by former army contractor Mohamad Ali who has accused army leaders and the president of wasting public money on building luxury properties.

On 29 March 2019, Alaa Abdel Fattah was released on probation after serving an unjust five-year prison term for participating in a peaceful protest. His probation terms required him to spend 12 hours every night at a police station for five years. On 29 September 2019, Alaa Abdel Fattah did not leave the Dokki police station in Cairo, where he spent his probation. The police told his mother that he was taken by the National Security Agency (NSA) officers to the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP). Later that day, Mohamed el-Baqer entered the SSSP building to represent him. According to their families and friends, Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed el-Baqer's whereabouts were unknown until on 1 October 2019, when they appeared for the first time since their arrest in Tora Maximum Security Prison 2. The questioning focused on Mohamed el-Baqer's work and the prosecutor did not provide any evidence against him except an NSA investigation file, which neither he nor his lawyer were allowed to examine.

On 18 March 2020, Alaa's mother Laila Soueif, his sister Mona Seif, his aunt Ahdaf Soueif and university professor Rabab el-Mahdi – were arrested by security services in front of the Cabinet building in Cairo after they staged a protest demanding the release of prisoners over fears of a coronavirus outbreak in the country's overcrowded prisons. A prosecutor accused them of "inciting a protest", "disseminating false information" and "possession of material disseminating false information". He then ordered their release pending investigations on bail of 5,000 Egyptian pounds (around US\$320). Although they made the bail payment the same day, they remained in detention overnight without legal grounds. On 19 March, the authorities transferred Laila Soueif to the SSSP building in New Cairo, where a prosecutor ordered her release on bail of 3,000 Egyptian pounds (around US\$190). All four were released that night.

In the aftermath of September 2019 protests, Amnesty International has documented how the Egyptian security forces have carried out sweeping arrests of protesters and rounded-up journalists, human rights lawyers, activists, and political figures in a bid to silence critics and deter further protests. This included 76 arrests across six cities between 19 and 29 September 2019. The Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, an independent NGO, reported that at least 2,300 have been arrested in relation to the protests. According to lawyers, scores of detainees have been released without questioning, but many others continue to be held.

Alaa Abdel Fattah, a well-known political activist and government critic, has been repeatedly arrested in recent years including for his role in the 2011 uprising.

Mohamed el-Baqer is a human rights lawyer and director of Adalah Center for Rights and Freedoms, which he founded in 2014. The Center focuses on criminal justice, the right to education and students' rights.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic or English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 2 June 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Alaa Abdel Fattah (he/him) and Mohamed el-Baqer (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/1141/2019/en/>