

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED LAWYER AT RISK AMID COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Relatives of human rights lawyer and activist, Mahienour el-Masry, unlawfully detained at Al-Qanater women's prison, are concerned about her safety amid fears of a potential outbreak of COVID-19 in Egyptian prisons. Family members last had news about Mahiebour from a former detainee released on 20 March 2020.

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

*Public Prosecutor Hamada al-Sawi
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Madinat al-Rehab
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2577 4716
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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 phones calls like prescribed by Egyptian law.

*Some, but not all inmates, have been able to send and receive written correspondence. However, Al-Qanater women's prison authorities did not allow **Mahienour el-Masry** to send letters to her family, which raises fears about her safety amid a potential outbreak of COVID-19 in prison. Her relatives last had any news about her on 20 March, when a released former detainee recounted that Mahienour was in good health.*

On 12 April 2020, Al-Qanater women's prison authorities started allowing most inmates, including Mahienour, to receive clothes, food, sanitizes, letters, and a hot meal weekly from their relatives.

Mahienour's pre-trial detention was last renewed on 20 February 2020 for 45 days. Since 15 March 2020, the Egyptian ministry of justice suspended all hearings before courts as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, detainees, including Mahienour, are not being transferred to court sessions or detention renewal hearings.

Amnesty International considers Mahienour to be a prisoner of conscience detained solely for her peaceful work defending victims of human rights violations.

I therefore ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Mahienour el-Masry and drop all charges against her. Pending her release, I urge you to ensure that she is provided with means to regularly communicate with her family 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

On 22 September 2019, security officers in plainclothes arrested Mahienour el-Masry. A Supreme State Security Prosecutor later questioned her on unfounded charges including “aiding a terrorist group in achieving its goals” and “spreading false news”. These charges are related to Mahienour’s participation in protests in March 2019 sparked by a deadly train crash in Cairo that resulted in the killings of 25 people and dozens of further injuries. The prosecutor then ordered her detention in Al-Qanater women’s prison, pending investigations.

Mahienour’s arrest came against the backdrop of the largest wave of arrests since 2014. On 20 and 21 September 2019, scattered protests broke out in different Egyptian cities calling on President Abdel Fattah 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. Amnesty International has documented the arrest of 76 individuals in relation to the protests between 20 and 29 September in six cities. Human rights lawyers working with NGOs including the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights and Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms have documented at least 2,300 arrests. According to lawyers, scores of detainees have been released without questioning, but many others remain in detention. The wave of arrests included journalists, human rights lawyers, activists, protesters and political figures in a bid to silence critics and deter further protests. The government has also temporarily added the BBC-News and Al Hurra TV channels to the list of hundreds of other websites blocked in Egypt and disrupted online messaging applications to thwart further protests.

Mahienour is a prominent human rights lawyer in Alexandria, where she played a leading role in defending the rights of workers, women and refugees. Since 2014, Mahienour has been in an out of detention multiple times in connection to her human rights activism or legitimate exercise of her rights to freedom of expression or assembly. While in detention in 2014 for exercising her right to freedom of assembly, she was awarded the Ludovic Trarieux Human Rights Prize, given each year to a lawyer working in defence of human rights.

In February 2015, Mahienour el-Masry was sentenced to two years in prison, reduced to one year and three months on appeal. She was convicted of “protesting without authorization”, “damaging police property”, “attacking security forces” and “threatening public security” on charges stemming from her participation, on 29 March 2013, in a protest in front of al-Raml Police Station in Alexandria. The protest was in solidarity with lawyers who were detained and interrogated inside the police station and who had accused police officers of verbally and physically attacking them. On 13 August 2016, Mahienour el-Masry was released from jail after serving her full sentence.

On 14 June 2017, Mahienour el-Masry, Moataseem Medhat and activists Asmaa Naeem, Waleed el-Amry and Ziad Abu el-Fadl participated in a protest in Alexandria against the Egyptian government’s decision to hand over control of two islands, Tiran and Sanafir, to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. On 18 November 2017, the Montazah Misdemeanour Court in Alexandria ordered the pre-trial detention of Mahienour el-Masry and Moataseem Medhat. On 30 December 2017, the same court sentenced both to two years in prison for “participating in an unauthorized protest” and “show of force”. The court also sentenced the three other activists to three years in prison, in absentia. On 13 January 2018, the Montazah Misdemeanour Court of Appeals acquitted Mahienour el-Masry and Moataseem Medhat of all charges.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic or English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 16 June 2020.

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Mahienour el-Masry (her/she)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/1140/2019/en/>