

# URGENT ACTION

## ACTIVIST SPENDS A YEAR IN PRISON UNJUSTLY

Egyptian human rights activist Sanaa Seif is serving an unjust 18 months' sentence in Al-Qanater Prison for women, following her conviction on bogus charges of spreading "false news", "misusing social media" and insulting a police officer on duty. Security forces arrested Sanaa Seif on 23 June 2020 as she was attempting to lodge a complaint about a violent assault she endured a day earlier outside Tora Prison, in full view of security officials. Sanaa Seif is a prisoner of conscience and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

**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](mailto:p.spokesman@op.gov.eg)

Twitter: @AlsisiOfficial

Dear President,

Human rights activist and prisoner of conscience **Sanaa Seif**, 26, is serving an unjust one-and-a-half-year prison term, solely stemming from her peaceful exercise of her human rights.

Unidentified security forces seized Sanaa Seif on 23 June 2020, without presenting a warrant, from outside the Public Prosecutor's Office in Cairo, the Egyptian capital, where she was planning to file a complaint about a violent assault she had suffered the day before, in full view of security forces. That day, Sanaa Seif, her mother, Laila Soueif, and sister, Mona Seif were waiting outside the Tora Prison Complex in Cairo, to receive a letter from her arbitrarily detained brother, the activist Alaa Abdel Fattah. A group of women approached the family and beat them with sticks, tore their clothes, dragged them onto the ground and stole some of their belongings. To date, the Egyptian authorities have failed to investigate this attack.

On 17 March 2021, the 10th South Cairo Criminal Court convicted Sanaa Seif on bogus charges of "disseminating false news", "misuse of social media" and insulting a police officer on duty. The latter charge relates to a verbal altercation with a police officer in front of the Tora Prison Complex when he pushed her mother on the day of the assault and relaying the incident on her social media. Sanaa Seif had also been publicly critical of the authorities' mishandling of Covid-19 outbreaks in Egypt's overcrowded and unhygienic prisons and has been calling for the release of those arbitrarily detained including her brother. Amnesty International has reviewed the evidence against Sanaa Seif - including comments posted online about the 22 June 2020 attack - and found that the criticism she expressed did not amount to advocacy of hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

**We therefore urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Sanaa Seif and quash her conviction. We also urge you to take measures to end the relentless harassment of her family, and conduct independent, impartial and thorough investigations into the assault against Sanaa Seif, her mother and sister in front of the Tora Prison Complex on 22 June 2020 in full view of security forces, with a view of bringing those responsible to justice in proceedings meeting international standards of fair trial.**

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Following her arrest on 23 June 2020, Sanaa Seif was taken to the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), a branch of the Public Prosecution specialized in investigating national security threats, where prosecutors questioned her over charges of “disseminating false news”, “inciting terrorist crimes” and “misuse of social media”. On 9 August 2020, she was again brought to the SSSP Cairo headquarters, without her lawyers being notified. The SSSP opened investigations into two additional charges, namely “verbally insulting a police officer on duty” and “defaming a police officer”. Under international human rights law, “insult” is not a recognizable offense and does not justify a limitation on freedom of expression. In addition, the UN Human Rights Committee has stated that “the mere fact that forms of expression are considered to be insulting to a public figure is not sufficient to justify the imposition of penalties”.

Prison visits, which had been suspended for five months following the Covid-19 outbreak, resumed in August 2020 with some restrictions in place. Sanaa Seif’s mother last visited her on 19 June 2021 and reported that she was in good health. Sanaa Seif and her family have suffered years of harassment and intimidation for their human rights activism. On 18 March 2020, Laila Soueif, Mona Seif, Sanaa’s aunt Ahdaf Soueif and university professor Rabab el-Mahdi were arrested by security services in front of the Cabinet building in Cairo after they stood in peaceful protest on a pavement demanding the release of prisoners over fears of a Covid-19 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 2020, the authorities transferred Laila Soueif to the SSSP, where a prosecutor ordered her release on bail of 3,000 Egyptian pounds (around US\$190). All four were released that night.

Sanaa Seif’s brother, activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, has also been in arbitrary detention without a trial since September 2019, solely due to his peaceful activism. On 23 November 2020, he was added to the “terrorists list” for five years without any due process as part of case No. 1781/2019 by the SSSP. This decision also bans him from travelling abroad and participating in political or civic life for five years.

Sanaa Seif is a human rights activist and film editor, who had been previously imprisoned unjustly in relation to two separate cases. Sanaa Seif, human rights defender Yara Sallam and 20 others were arrested on 21 June 2014 in the Cairo suburb of Heliopolis, after a demonstration was dispersed by security forces in the area. On 26 October 2014, a Cairo Misdemeanour Court convicted Sanaa Seif over a number of charges in relation to the protest under the draconian Law Regulating the Right to Public Gatherings, Processions and Peaceful Protests (Law 107 of 2013) and sentenced her to three years’ imprisonment, followed by three years of probation, a fine of 10,000 Egyptian Pounds (around US\$630 at the time), and the payment of compensation for the damages caused. This sentence was later reduced on appeal on 28 December 2014 to two years’ imprisonment and a two-year probation. On 23 September 2015, Sanaa Seif was released following a presidential pardon. In a separate case, a Misdemeanour Court in Cairo sentenced her to six months in prison for insulting the judiciary on 4 May 2016. On 15 November 2016, Sanaa Seif was released from prison after serving the six-month sentence.

On 12 June 2021, Sanaa Seif’s lawyer submitted a request for her conditional release to the Assistant Minister of Interior for the Prison Service Sector, and the Chairman of the Higher Committee for Conditional Release. At the time of writing, no response had been received.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Arabic or English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 18 August 2021

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

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Sanaa Seif (she/her)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/3013/2020/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/3013/2020/en/)