

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JOINT STATEMENT

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EGYPT: NGOS CELEBRATE RELEASE OF PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE RAMY SHAATH AND CONFIRM NEED TO MOBILIZE AGAINST REPRESSION OF PEACEFUL ACTIVISM IN EGYPT

Today the undersigned non-governmental organizations celebrate the release of Ramy Shaath, a valiant human rights defender who has inspired many in the Palestinian and Egyptian rights communities with his bravery and courage. His release is a triumph for all his friends, family members, NGOs, parliamentarians and thousands of supporters worldwide; it confirms once again that standing up for human rights and speaking out persistently in the face of injustice can and does make a real difference.

The release of Egyptian-Palestinian rights activist Ramy Shaath brings an end to his painful, unjustified two-and-a-half-year ordeal behind bars in Egypt's Tora prison. The NGOs deplore the fact that Shaath, who should have been released unconditionally and provided reparations for the harm suffered due to his wrongful detention, was compelled to renounce his Egyptian citizenship in order to secure his release.

Shaath was first arrested in July 2019, in his home in Cairo and in front of his wife Céline Lebrun-Shaath, solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and participation in public affairs. Céline, a French national, was then arbitrarily deported after being denied access to consular support, while Shaath was forcibly disappeared and then remanded into pretrial detention for more than two years in Case 930 of 2019. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention considered his detention arbitrary as it stems solely from the exercise of his human rights.

More than 100,000 supporters in dozens of countries signed petitions calling on the Egyptian authorities to set Shaath free. His supporters also included hundreds of legislators from France, the United States, Germany, Belgium, and the European Parliament who made public statements demanding Shaath's release. In addition, dozens of internationally known artists and public figures expressed solidarity with Shaath.

Shaath's release does not end the need for international action on the Egyptian government's abysmal human rights record, nor does it improve the situation for the countless prisoners who remain arbitrarily detained in Egyptian prisons. These include peaceful activists, human rights defenders, lawyers, academics, and journalists detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including many of those who were, like Shaath, initially detained pending investigations in Case 930 of 2019. Most of those who were also under investigation in the case remain wrongfully detained or are serving unjust sentences handed down in unfair trials related to other cases.

We call upon the Egyptian authorities to take immediate action to release all those arbitrarily detained for exercising their human rights, end the misuse of counter-terrorism legislation and remove Shaath and other peaceful activists and politicians from the country's "terrorists list." We also call on the international community to support efforts to establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the human rights situation in Egypt at the UN Human Rights Council.

Signatories (listed alphabetically):

ACAT-France

Al-Haq

Amnesty International

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

FIDH

The Freedom Initiative

Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

BACKGROUND

On 5 July 2019, at about 12:45 am, around a dozen heavily armed police officers stormed the home of Egyptian-Palestinian political activist Ramy Shaath in Cairo without identifying themselves or showing an arrest warrant. They searched the apartment and seized computers, hard drives and mobile phones. They arrested Shaath and his wife, Céline Lebrun Shaath, a history teacher and community organizer, was unlawfully deported to France later that day, even though she had been legally residing in Egypt since March 2012.

The security forces took Shaath to an undisclosed location and concealed his whereabouts for around 36 hours. The officers at Qasr el-Nil police station, in the center of Cairo, told his family and lawyers that he was not in their custody. Later, a lawyer informed the family that Shaath had appeared before a prosecutor at the Supreme State Security Prosecution in New Cairo. He was not allowed to call his family or legal counsel, and during the interrogation session he was represented by a duty lawyer.

Shaath's pre-trial detention was renewed more than 30 times after his arrest in relation to Case 930 of 2019, which became known as the "Hope Coalition Case." Other defendants in the case detained around the same time as Shaath include prominent figures in Egyptian politics and civil society: Zyad el-Elaimy, a lawyer, former parliamentarian, and a leader of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party; political activist Hossam Mo'anes and journalist Hisham Fouad; labor activists Hassan Barbary and Alaa Essam; writer and economist Omar el-Shenety; and businessmen Osama al-Aqbawi and Mustafa Abdel Moez. After spending more than two years in pre-trial detention, in November, Zyad el-Elaimy, Hossam Moanis and Hisham Fouad, were convicted and sentenced to between three and five years in prison following a grossly unfair trial by an emergency court. The human rights violations suffered by the Hope Coalition Case defendants are emblematic of the Egyptian authorities' ruthless crackdown on all forms of dissent and the cruelty of the fundamentally flawed criminal justice system where due process and fair trial rights are systematically violated, while members of the security forces enjoy impunity for crimes under international law and serious human rights violations including unlawful killings, torture and enforced disappearance.

In April 2020, a chamber of Cairo's Criminal Court decided in absentia to arbitrarily add Shaath to Egypt's "terrorist list" for a period of five years, along with politician Zyad el-Elaimy. The Court of Cassation rejected Shaath and el-Elaimy's appeal and upheld the listing decision, condemned by UN rights experts.

Prior to his 2019 arbitrary arrest and detention, Shaath had been harassed by the Egyptian authorities for years due to his political and human rights activism. Though he holds Egyptian nationality through both his mother and father, the Interior Ministry attempted to deny this by refusing to renew his Egyptian passport in 2012. Shaath challenged this refusal in court and won in 2013. The authorities appealed and finally forced Shaath to renounce his citizenship in exchange for his freedom.