

URGENT ACTION

PROTESTER RISKS DECADES IN PRISON FOR T-SHIRT

Arbitrarily detained protester Mahmoud Hussein faces up to 25 years in prison simply for wearing a T-shirt with an anti-torture slogan back in January 2014. He was already arbitrarily detained from January 2014 to March 2016 in relation to the same case before being released on bail. Mahmoud Hussein was rearrested on 30 August 2023 and is currently detained at Badr 1 prison, pending trial in front of an emergency court over bogus terrorism-related and other charges. Prison authorities have been denying him access to adequate healthcare, including by withholding the medication he needs for his panic attacks, developed after he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. He must be immediately and unconditionally released as his detention is solely linked to the exercise of his human rights.

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

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Dear counsellor,

I write to express my grave concern over the prolonged arbitrary detention of protester Mahmoud Hussein. Security forces arrested him at a checkpoint on 30 August 2023 on his way back to Cairo from Beni Suef and subjected him to enforced disappearance at various facilities controlled by the National Security Agency (NSA) for five days. He was subsequently transferred to the prosecution, which ordered his detention pending trial on bogus charges of membership in a terrorist group, possession of explosive devices and Molotov cocktails, and incitement to violence, which, if convicted, carry a maximum prison sentence of 25 years. These charges are in connection to a case dating back to his arrest in January 2014, when he was just 18, for wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Nation without Torture" and the emblem of the "25 January Revolution." Mahmoud Hussein spent over two years in arbitrary pretrial detention before his release on bail in March 2016 following public campaigning. On 26 February 2018, an Emergency State Security Court (ESSC) convicted him in his absence and sentenced him to life imprisonment in a grossly unfair trial marred by allegations of torture. According to Egyptian law, as Mahmoud Hussein was tried in his absence, he is now standing retrial on the same charges, also in front of an ESSC. Trials in front of ESSCs are inherently unfair, as their verdicts are not subject to appeal, but only ratification by the president. The next hearing is scheduled for 23 April 2024.

Mahmoud Hussein is currently detained in Badr 1 Prison, where Amnesty International has documented concerns regarding cruel and inhuman detention conditions and denial of adequate healthcare to prisoners. On 13 November 2023, Mahmoud Hussein had an anal fistula surgery at Badr's medical facility, and there are concerns that he is not receiving the adequate follow-up care he needs inside prison. Prison authorities have also failed to provide him with any mental health treatment, including by withholding his prescribed medication for panic attacks. His panic attacks developed during his previous incarceration, when he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings and the use of electric shocks.

I urge you to ensure Mahmoud Hussein's immediate and unconditional release as his detention stems solely from the exercise of his right to freedom of expression and drop all charges against him. Pending his release, he must be granted regular access to his family, lawyers and adequate healthcare, including in outside hospitals if necessary, and held in conditions that comply with international standards for the treatment of prisoners.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Security forces first arrested then 18-year-old Mahmoud Hussein on [25 January](#) 2014, in the aftermath of protests marking the 3rd anniversary of the “25 January Revolution”. Security forces stopped him at a checkpoint in the neighbourhood of El-Marg, northern Cairo, when he was returning home on a bus from protests, and arbitrarily arrested him simply because he was wearing a T-shirt with the slogan “A Nation without Torture” and a scarf with the emblem of the January 25 Revolution. Amnesty International [documented](#) how, following his arrest in 2014, National Security Agency (NSA) officials subjected him to [torture](#) and other ill-treatment, including beatings and the use of electric shocks to his hands, back and testicles. As a result of the torture, he was forced to “confess” to belonging to a banned group, possessing Molotov cocktails and hand grenades, and participating in unauthorized protests, with his forced “confession” recorded on video. The day after he “confessed” on camera, Mahmoud Hussein was taken for questioning by the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP). He denied all the accusations and said he had been tortured to “confess”, but the prosecutor did not refer him for forensic examination or order any investigation into his torture allegations. Mahmoud Hussein stayed in El-Marg police station for six days and was later transferred to Abu Zaabal Prison where he was beaten upon arrival. In May 2014, he was transferred to Cairo’s Tora Appeal Prison, where he was also subjected to beatings on at least two occasions. He was eventually transferred Cairo’s Tora Investigations Prison. He remained in pretrial detention under case number 715 of 2014 in El-Marg and was referred for trial on 31 January 2016. On 24 March 2016, he was released on bail of 1,000 Egyptian pounds. The torture and other ill-treatment to which he was subjected left him with chronic health concerns. After being released from prison, Mahmoud Hussein developed a dependency on a crutch for walking and had two hip replacement surgeries.

Mahmoud Hussein is currently held [in Badr 1 Prison](#), located 70 km northeast of Cairo. According to Amnesty International’s research, prisoners there complain of cruel and inhuman conditions characterized by the deliberate denial of healthcare, exposure to extreme cold and constant camera surveillance. Family visits are allowed once a month for 20 minutes and are conducted through a glass barrier preventing direct and physical contact with loved ones. This is in breach of Egypt’s prison regulations that stipulate weekly visits lasting no less than 45 minutes for detainees in pretrial detention.

Mahmoud Hussein’s renewed arrest came amid a wave of fresh arrests of critics and relatives of dissidents based abroad, including the fathers of Egyptian journalist Ahmed Gamal Ziada, based in Belgium, and German-Egyptian activist Fagr al-Adly, based in Germany; both arrested in August 2023. Mahmoud Hussein is among the thousands of individuals arbitrarily detained in Egypt solely for exercising their human rights or following proceedings violating fair trial rights or without legal basis. Those held include human rights defenders, political activists, members of opposition parties, trade unionists, workers, peaceful protesters, journalists, lawyers, social media influencers, members of religious minorities, and medical professionals. During 2023, 834 prisoners held for political reasons were released, but authorities arrested triple this number. The Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) interrogated at least 2,504 suspected critics or opponents on accusations of involvement in terrorism-related offences, cybercrimes, protests and spreading “false news”. SSSP prosecutors and judges routinely renew pretrial detention orders for thousands of detainees without allowing them to meaningfully challenge the legality of their detention.

Following his release from detention in 2016, Mahmoud Hussein tried to rebuild his life, opening a small business to produce T-Shirts, and had recently proposed to his girlfriend. He had also undergone medical treatment and was getting counselling.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 13 May 2024.

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Mahmoud Hussein (He/him).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/7223/2023/en/>