

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 25, 2020

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Arab Republic of Egypt
Cairo, Egypt

Dear President al-Sisi:

We write to strongly urge you to unconditionally release the detained staff members of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and to immediately end your smear campaign against EIPR and other civil society organizations. Punishing one of Egypt's most prominent and respected human rights organizations for nothing more than carrying out its work is an alarming attack on Egypt's civil society community.

During the week of November 15, Egyptian security forces arrested EIPR staff members Mohamed Basheer, Karim Ennarah, and Gasser Abdelrazek. They face baseless charges of joining a terrorist group, spreading false information, and undermining public security. Prosecutors have added them to Case 855/2020, along with other human rights defenders and journalists, including Solafa Magdy, Mahienour el-Masry, and Esraa Abdelfattah. Meanwhile, there appears to be a coordinated smear campaign against EIPR in state-affiliated Egyptian media outlets, adding to our concern that this is a politically-motivated effort intended to silence human rights defenders. We are troubled to hear that on November 23, Abdelrazek appeared before the prosecution and told his lawyers that he has been kept in solitary confinement, provided only a metal bed with no mattress, and insufficient clothing to keep him warm. We have long been concerned with conditions in Egypt's prisons, including allegations of mistreatment and torture; this concern has only been compounded by the needless deaths of people in custody, including U.S. citizen Mustafa Kassem.

We understand that the detained staff were interrogated regarding a November 3 meeting at the EIPR office with representatives from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland. These arrests of EIPR staff following meetings with foreign officials suggest that your government is seeking to criminalize engagement with foreign diplomats. Foreign governments must be able to meet with civil society organizations in Egypt—as they can and do freely in countries all over the world—without fear of retaliation. Engagement with local civil society is a vital component of international diplomacy. Governments and institutions around the world rely on analysis and reporting from these organizations to inform our understanding of human rights, including in Egypt.


While we were pleased to see the recent release from prison of some of the family members of U.S. citizen Mohamed Soltan, we remain deeply concerned with the substandard conditions in Egyptian prisons and by the number of people, including U.S. citizens, detained arbitrarily for alarming periods of time. The wrongful arrest of human rights defenders, use of arbitrary and extended detention to hold political prisoners, and other gross violations of human rights is

inconsistent with the democratic norms the U.S. expects from its international security partners. Continuing these recent actions and ongoing crackdowns on civil society organizations undermines U.S.-Egyptian relations and sends a clear signal to us that this is not a relationship Egypt values.

Given the above concerns, we reiterate our request that your government immediately and unconditionally release all detained EIPR staff. In addition to the three staff members who were recently arrested, we urge you to include and unconditionally release Patrick George Zaki, an EIPR researcher who was arrested earlier this year in a separate case. Further, the travel ban issued against Hossam Bahgat—EIPR’s founder and interim director in Abdelrazek’s absence—must also be lifted, and his assets unfrozen.

We ask that you consider this request seriously and urgently. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator


Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

/s/ Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/ Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/ Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

/s/ Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

/s/ James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/ Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

/s/ Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/ Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

/s/ Brad Sherman
Member of Congress

/s/ Gregory Meeks
Member of Congress

/s/ Katie Porter
Member of Congress

/s/ Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

/s/ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

/s/ Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

/s/ David Cicilline
Member of Congress

/s/ David Trone
Member of Congress

/s/ Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress

/s/ Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

/s/ Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

/s/ Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/ Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/ Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

/s/ Abigail D. Spanberger
Member of Congress

/s/ André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/ David E. Price
Member of Congress