

November 25, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Re: The Arbitrary and Abusive Detention of Leading Egyptian Human Rights Defenders



National Office
125 Broad Street, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10004

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

I am writing to express my deepest concern about the arbitrary and abusive detention of Mr. Gasser Abdel Razek, Mr. Karim Ennarah and Mr. Mohamed Basheer, three senior staff members of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) – a sister organization to the American Civil Liberties Union, and a fellow member of the International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations (INCLO).

I write with urgent asks of our State Department including to call for the immediate and unconditional release of EIPR staff detained by Egypt. We urge that the State Department demand that the Egyptian government allow diplomatic visitation to their place of detention and lift the travel ban and assets freeze placed on them.

Mr. Basheer, the Administrative Manager at the EIPR, was arrested in his home just after midnight on Sunday, November 15th. Mr. Ennarah, the EIPR's Criminal Justice Unit Director, was subsequently arrested on November 18th while on vacation in Dahab. The arrest of Mr. Abdel Razek, the EIPR's Executive Director, followed on November 20th. In each case, Egypt's Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) ordered their detention for 15 days under unfounded suspicions of "joining a terrorist organization with knowledge of its purposes; using a personal account on the internet to spread false information that undermines public security; committing one of the crimes of funding terrorism; and broadcasting false news and statements that undermines public security and harming national interest."

According to the EIPR's lawyers, the prosecution did not present reliable evidence in any one of the three cases, but instead referred to "investigations that uncovered a mobilization that aims to spread false information and baseless rumors."

The detention of Mr. Basheer, Mr. Ennarah and Mr. Abdel Razek is just the latest episode in the Egyptian government's ongoing crackdown on legal and human rights professionals as well as social and political activists. This case must be considered within the broader context of general authoritarianism and repression targeting the most fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by both the Egyptian constitution and international human rights norms and treaties.



Mr. Basheer, Mr. Ennarah and Mr. Abdel Razek were detained solely for their legitimate human rights work and specifically in response to the EIPR's recent meeting with 13 ambassadors and accredited diplomats from the UK, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and Switzerland to discuss improving human rights in Egypt. Advocating for human rights and meeting with foreign diplomats are not crimes. We do not believe the three human rights defenders committed any crimes, and indeed there is no evidence presented by the Egyptian authorities to back up their claims.

I am extremely concerned about the health and safety of Mr. Basheer, Mr. Ennarah and Mr. Abdel Razek. Earlier this week, the EIPR's legal defense team was able to see Mr. Abdel Razek when he was brought to the Supreme State Security Prosecution for further interrogation. There, Mr. Abdel Razek complained about inhumane and degrading treatment. He has been held in solitary confinement and is not allowed to leave his prison cell. His head was shaved. He has access to only a metal bed with neither covers nor a mattress. Additionally, his belongings were confiscated, including money which he was denied the right to use in the prison's canteen. He was given only a light blanket and summer clothes, despite cold weather.

According to EIPR's legal team, Mr. Abdel Razek's interrogation focused on EIPR's activities in recent years, particularly its documentation of human rights violations in places of detention and the unprecedented spike in death sentences and executions under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Torture, ill-treatment of detainees, and other grave violations of human rights are widespread in Egypt. The State Department's most recent [human rights report on Egypt](#) stated that forced disappearance, torture, arbitrary detention, and life-threatening prison conditions are among the "significant human rights issues" in the country.

While I appreciate the recent expression of concern in Tweets posted by the State Department, the U.S. government must do more to press for their immediate and unconditional release. Despite the fact that their detention has been widely and globally condemned including on behalf of both [Republican and Democratic congressional leaders](#), the Egyptian government has yet to release the EIPR staff and has provided no guarantees that Mr. Abdel Razek and his colleagues will not be subjected to torture and ill-treatment. Therefore, the U.S. government should demand an independent investigation into Mr. Abdel Razek's ill-treatment and request diplomatic visitation to their place of detention.

I respectfully suggest that the U.S. government must call for the immediate and unconditional release of EIPR staff who have been arbitrarily detained, mistreated and persecuted for their legitimate non-violent activism. In addition to the three EIPR staff members who were recently arrested, the U.S. government should also call for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Patrick George Zaki, an EIPR researcher who was arrested earlier this year in a separate case. Finally, the State Department should demand the dismissal of all charges against EIPR staff,

including the travel ban and asset freeze against EIPR's founder, Mr. Hossam Bahgat.

I appreciate your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Romero", with a horizontal line underneath.

Anthony D. Romero
Executive Director



Cc: The Honorable James E. Risch, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
The Honorable Bob Menendez, Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
The Honorable Eliot L. Engel, Chairman, U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs
The Honorable Michael McCaul, Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs