

Global Coalition Calls for Release of Mohamed el-Baqer and Alaa Abdel Fattah on Three Year Anniversary of their Arrests

Thursday, September 29, 2022 marks three years since Egyptian human rights lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer and British-Egyptian writer and pro-democracy activist Alaa Abdel Fattah were arrested by the Egyptian authorities. As a global coalition of civil society organizations and individuals, we come together on the anniversary of their arrest to call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately drop all charges, close all cases involving them, and promptly release el-Baqer and Abdel Fattah. The coalition additionally urges the British authorities to demand consular access and to intervene to secure the release and deportation to the UK of their fellow citizen Abdel Fattah as his health has deteriorated to a critical and life-threatening point, following more than 180 days on hunger strike.

Alaa Abdel Fattah is a software developer, prominent writer, and pro-democracy activist. He was one of the leading voices and campaigners during the January 25, 2011 revolution. He has been published in numerous outlets; he is well-known for founding a prominent Arabic blog aggregator; and he has been involved in a number of citizen journalism initiatives. Abdel Fattah has been arrested under every Egyptian head of State during his lifetime. His book, [*You Have Not Yet Been Defeated*](#), which compiles some of his deeply influential writings, has received widespread recognition. Mohamed el-Baqer is a human rights lawyer and the founder and director of the Adalah Center for Rights and Freedoms. He has a long history defending individuals whose rights have been violated, including religious and ethnic minorities, and of providing pro bono legal assistance to those prosecuted for exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression. Both Abdel Fattah and el-Baqer have been recognized around the world for their contributions to human rights and the rule of law. Most recently, it was announced that Abdel Fattah would be awarded the [2022 Electronic Frontier Foundation Award](#) and that el-Baqer would receive the [UIA/LexisNexis Rule of Law Award](#).

On September 29, 2019, Alaa Abdel Fattah was arrested while fulfilling his probation requirements at the El-Dokki Police Station. He was questioned before the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) [on charges](#) of joining an illegal organization, receiving foreign funding, spreading false news, and misusing social media; he was then ordered into pretrial detention pending Case No. 1356 of 2019. On the same day and while attending Abdel Fattah's interrogation in his capacity as his lawyer, Mohamed el-Baqer was similarly arrested, questioned before the SSSP, and ordered into pretrial detention pending the same case and the same arbitrary charges. They were both transferred to Tora Maximum Security Prison 2 and upon their arrival there, [were subjected to ill-treatment](#). Once at the prison, they were placed in inhumane detention conditions; denied outdoor recreation time or any sunlight at all; and denied access to books, newspapers, a radio, a clock, and a mirror. In May 2022, after two and a half years of detention under these conditions, Abdel Fattah was transferred to the Wadi al-Natroun Prison Complex; El-Baqer remains in Tora Maximum Security Prison 2. Both have suffered severe deterioration to their physical and mental health as a result of the conditions of their incarceration.

Since their arrest, Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed el-Baqer [have been designated](#) per the country's terrorist list in relation to [a separate case](#) for which they have never been questioned or

been given the right to defend themselves (Case No. 1781 of 2019). As a result of this designation, they face a travel ban, asset freeze, and for el-Baqer, potential disbarment as a lawyer. On August 31, 2020, el-Baqer was questioned before the SSSP and [added to a third case](#): Case No. 855 of 2020. Then, in October 2021, lawyers learned that Abdel Fattah, el-Baqer, and blogger Mohamed Ibrahim (popularly known as Mohamed Oxygen) would be referred to the Emergency State Security Court (ESSC) in yet another case. The misdemeanor charge from Case No. 1356 of 2019 was simply copied into this new case, docketed as Case No. 1228 of 2021/Emergency State Security. Notwithstanding President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's lifting of the state of emergency in October 2021, on December 20, 2021, and following [an unfair trial](#) lacking proper due process in which defense lawyers were denied the right to present a defense on behalf of their clients and denied permission to copy the case files, Abdel Fattah [was sentenced](#) to five years in prison and el-Baqer and Oxygen to four years in prison [on false news charges](#). The time they spent in pretrial detention pending the original case (Case No. 1356 of 2019) will not count as time served toward the the sentences of imprisonment, and the verdict, which cannot be judicially appealed, [has since been ratified](#), as required for cases brought before the ESSC.

In April 2022, Alaa Abdel Fattah's family [announced](#) that he had gained British citizenship, but had been—and continues to be—denied the right to consular visits. In the same month, Abdel Fattah launched a hunger strike to protest the refusal of Egyptian authorities to investigate the [complaints](#) that he and his family had previously submitted involving violations faced in detention since his September 2019 arrest, and to demand that Egyptian officials allow consular visits and access to his family's lawyers in the United Kingdom “so that they can take all possible legal measures regarding not only the violations he has been subjected to, but all the crimes against humanity he has witnessed during his imprisonment.” Abdel Fattah remains on hunger strike; his family has raised [serious and time-sensitive concerns](#) about his health, particularly as the Egyptian authorities refuse to acknowledge his hunger strike.

As Egypt gears up to host the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 27) in Sharm el-Sheikh this November, it is of paramount importance that the Egyptian authorities release Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed el-Baqer. The country cannot purport to lead on the international stage through fora like COP 27 without also opening up civic space, a demand that [has been made](#) by Egyptian civil society organizations and hundreds of allies around the world. Continuing to arbitrarily detain so many, Abdel Fattah and el-Baqer included, indicates that Egypt is not serious about making meaningful progress on human rights and sends an alarming message that flies in the face of the polished image it seeks to convey.

We, the undersigned, reiterate our call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately release Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed el-Baqer, as well as their [co-defendant Mohamed Oxygen](#), who similarly marked three years in detention earlier this month. We urge the British authorities to intervene immediately to save Abdel Fattah's life amid his health's alarming deterioration. And we call on the international community to add their voices in support of calls to release Abdel Fattah, el-Baqer, and all of those unjustly and arbitrarily detained in Egypt.

Signatories

Organizations

ARTICLE 19

Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE)

Bridge That Gap Initiative

COP26 Coalition Cambridge

CIVICUS

Climate Sense Africa

Committee for Justice (CFJ)

The Committee to Protect Journalists

Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)

Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)

Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)

EgyptWide for Human Rights

Electronic Frontier Foundation

El Nadeem Center

EuroMed Rights

FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Freedom House

The Freedom Initiative

Friends of the Earth Scotland

Guernica 37

HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement

IBON International

International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

MENA Rights Group

NEW HOPE FOR THE POOR

Oilwatch Africa

Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum

PEN America

Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

Rain Drops Community Foundation

Refugees Platform in Egypt (RFE)

Reporters Without Borders

Robert F Kennedy Human Rights

Sierra Leone School Green Clubs (SLSGC)

Sinai Foundation for Human Rights

The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)

#TillTheLastPrisoner Campaign

UIA-IROL (The Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers)

Women Human Rights Defenders Hub

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Individuals

Aoife Devaney

Maggie Chapman MSP

Paul Mather

Ramy Shaath, Egyptian-Palestinian human rights defender

Solafa Magdy, Egyptian journalist and human rights defender