

July 15, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Right Honorable Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London, SW1A 2AA

Dear Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister,

We write, as members of the United States Congress and UK Parliament, to ask you to intensify the efforts of your governments to lift arbitrary and unjust travel bans, asset freezes and lengthy pretrial detentions imposed on human rights activists, lawyers and others by the Egyptian government. We ask that you leverage your strong relationship with Egypt to help end these unlawful and unjust punitive actions.

Since President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi came to power in 2014, the Egyptian authorities have escalated the abuse of travel bans and asset freezes against critics, activists, and others, negatively impacting American and British families, universities, and civil society. The bans, such as those on staff of the Egyptian Institute for Personal Rights (EIPR), are a critical component of Egypt's wider crackdown on civil society, allowing the government to silently punish its critics without the international attention that prison sentences or lengthy pretrial detention attract.

A joint report by Human Rights Watch and FairSquare released last week finds that travel bans have separated families, damaged careers, and taken a profound personal toll on the mental health of those affected. Some of the 15 Egyptians interviewed for the report, including several with direct links to the US and UK, have been unable to leave Egypt for six years. Another report by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy and the Freedom Initiative details the arbitrary, open-ended nature of the bans and the inability of those affected to challenge them through legal means.

Five current or former employees of the EIPR are under travel bans imposed for political purposes: Gasser Abdel Razek, Hossam Bahgat, Mohammed Basheer, Karim Ennarah and Patrick Zaki. Many of the signatories to this letter advocated for the unconditional release of Abdel Razek, Basheer and Ennarah in November 2020, when all three were arrested following a meeting with European and Canadian diplomats. There was much celebration when they were quickly released the following month, with President Sisi stating in 2021 that the case was related to administrative issues with the EIPR's registration. Despite this, all three were barred from leaving the country. Four of the five have their assets frozen, which leaves them unable to work or lead any sort of normal life. Meanwhile, they live with the threat of re-arrest under terrorism charges, which the authorities could re-activate at any time.

Before his arrest, Karim Ennarah was set to move to London to be with his wife, a British filmmaker. The ban has forced him into a long-distance relationship and he is unable to work due to the asset freeze. Gamal Eid, the founder of The Arab Network for Human Rights Information,

has been under a travel ban since 2016. Eid's wife, a US citizen, and daughter moved to New York in 2017. The ban has prevented Eid from visiting them and as a result, his green card has expired. Graduate student Waleed Salem has been separated from his daughter for four years and unable to finish his PhD at the University of Washington. Aida Seif El Dawla, a psychiatrist and prominent anti-torture campaigner whose work has won numerous international awards, has been banned from travel since 2016.

Travel bans and bank freezes form an important element of the Egyptian authorities' extensive architecture of repression, which includes the holding of thousands of people in pretrial detention, often without evidence of wrongdoing and for merely exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and free expression. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders last year expressed dismay at the continued use of pretrial detention orders, under the pretext of anti-terrorism and national security laws, to persecute human rights defenders. Indeed, as the Freedom Initiative and TIMEP report documents, travel bans often precede or follow periods of pretrial detention, leaving those subjected to them vulnerable to arrest at any time. EIPR researcher Patrick Zaki spent 22 months in pre-trial detention before being released and placed under a travel ban.

Egypt is hosting COP27 this year, which President Al-Sisi has declared "the year of civil society." As such, all eyes will be on Egypt and its partners to maintain an open environment for civil society to operate. We urge you to consider unlawful travel bans, asset freezes and pretrial detentions as serious deprivations of liberty, and to use your leverage with your partners in the Egyptian government to immediately resolve these issues. By doing so, the US and the UK will be playing a meaningful role in protecting Egyptian civil society and holding the Egyptian government to the level of accountability that we strive for in our defense, security and commercial partners around the world. Privately raising these cases with President Sisi and his foreign minister has not yielded the results we would like to see. It is imperative that the United States and the United Kingdom act.

We are grateful for your personal engagement in this pressing matter. We look forward to your reply.



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Rushanara Ali MP



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Crispin Blunt MP

Betty Mccollum
Member of Congress

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Ben Bradshaw MP

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

Richard Blumenthal

Deidre Brock MP

David E. Price

United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Jeffery Merkley
United States Senator

Anthony Browne MP

Rosie Cooper MP

Martyn Day MP

Damian Green MP

Meg Hillier MP

Ben Lake MP

Kenny MacAskill MP

Layla Moran MP

Yasmin Qureshi MP

Karl Turner MP

Baroness Blackstone

Lord Moore of Etchingham

Lord Willets

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Alistair Carmichael MP

Sarah Champion MP

Jeremy Corbyn MP

Iain Duncan-Smith MP

Neale Hanvey MP

Christine Jardine MP

Tony Lloyd MP

Stewart McDonald MP

Sarah Olney MP

Zarah Sultana MP

Mohammad Yasin MP

Viscount Chandos

The Duke of Norfolk

Member of Congress

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Wendy Chamberlin MP

Daisy Cooper MP

Jon Cruddas MP

Margaret Ferrier MP

Harriet Harman MP

Kim Johnson MP

Caroline Lucas MP

John McDonnell MP

Ian Paisley MP

Stephen Timms MP

Lord Alton of Liverpool

Lord Marlesford

Lord Triesman