



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ

Email: office@brismes.org

Website: www.brismes.ac.uk

Prime Minister Keir Starmer
UK Government
Sent by Email: keir.starmer.mp@parliament.uk

The Rt Hon David Lammy MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs UK Government
Sent by Email: fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk david.lammy.mp@parliament.uk

2 June 2025

Dear Prime Minister,

Dear Secretary of State,

We write with utmost urgency on behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) Committee on Academic Freedom to demand that the Prime Minister's Office immediately intervene and lobby the Egyptian government for the **immediate and unconditional release** of British-Egyptian citizen Alaa Abd El-Fattah.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest national academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. It is committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression within the region and in connection with the study of the region, both in the UK and globally, and it is under this remit that we write to you. Our engagement in Alaa's case spans over several years and, most recently, we wrote to the Secretary State in [October 2024](#), soon after Alaa's mother began her hunger strike. **With recent and increasingly dire developments - specifically, Alaa's hunger strike reaching its 100th day, coupled with the critical health deterioration of his mother, Professor Laila Soueif, who has been hospitalized after 242 days on hunger strike - we now call for immediate action.**

Alaa Abd El-Fattah, a prominent human rights and democracy advocate, and dual British-Egyptian citizen, has been held in detention since his arrest in 2019. After two years in remand pending investigation, Alaa was sentenced to five years for "joining a terrorist group, spreading false news and misusing social media", solely for exercising his right to free speech and expression. On 29 September 2024, he was due to be released, having served the full five years, however, authorities have refused to count the two years in remand within his sentence, in violation of Egyptian law. In a [May 29 report](#), the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled Alaa's ongoing detention unlawful, calling upon the Egyptian authorities to immediately release him. Throughout his imprisonment, Alaa has been exposed to a range of [legal and human rights abuses](#), including the withholding of British consular visits.

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In October 2024, we wrote to the Secretary of State and stressed the urgency of the need to secure Alaa's release, highlighting the worsening condition of his mother, Professor Leila Soueif, who was on a hunger strike at the time. In response, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office reassured us that "Mr El-Fattah's case remains a priority for the UK Government." However, seven months later, Alaa remains in prison. With Professor Leila now in critical condition, facing imminent death, the Prime Minister's Office must take immediate and direct action to secure Mr Abd El-Fattah's release. It must be made clear that the continued illegal incarceration and abuse of a British citizen will have serious repercussions for diplomatic relations, economic ties, and tourism between the United Kingdom and Egypt. Due to the urgency of the situation and the extensive breaches of international law, we also call on the UK government to engage with international processes, including activating the International Court of Justice, to hold the Egyptian authorities accountable.

With the risk of Professor Soueif's imminent passing increasing with every day that Alaa remains in prison, Alaa's sisters, Mona and Sanaa, and 12 year-old son Khaled are enduring extreme anguish. The Prime Minister must act now, without delay, to resolve this catastrophic crisis.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Nicola Pratt
BRISMES President

Dr Lewis Turner
Chair of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom