

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi  
Arab Republic of Egypt  
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Chancellor Hamada El-Sawy  
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Prime Solicitor-General Khaled Diauddin  
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c/o Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
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25 July 2023

Dear Mr. President,

Following your decision to pardon Mr Patrick George Zaki, we write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) and on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Italian Society for the Study of the Middle East (SeSaMO) to express our deep concerns regarding the ongoing detention of thousands of other students, academics, researchers and human rights defenders in Egypt.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest national academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. Both societies are committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region. SeSaMO is a leading Italian organisation devoted to the study of the Middle East in several disciplines and time periods.

Mr Zaki is an Egyptian student who recently graduated from the EU Erasmus Mundus-funded GEMMA Masters programme at the University of Bologna. He is also a human rights researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). He was detained on 7 February 2020, after returning to Egypt from Italy for a family visit. He was subsequently sentenced to three years imprisonment for ‘spreading false news’ and for ‘terrorism’, amongst other charges, for merely publishing his writings about the discrimination Coptic Christians face in Egypt. While we are heartened to hear he has now been pardoned, the circumstances of his arrest, detention, trial and sentencing underscores the plight of thousands of other political prisoners and prisoners of


conscience, many of them academics and human rights defenders, who are still being held in detention.

Both Societies have previously written to you noting their deep concern at the systematic violations of human rights in Egypt, including harassment of human rights defenders, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience and of their lawyers, friends and families, who are subjected to arrests on flimsy charges, practices such as ‘detention rotation’, and who when detained are often targets of violent treatment both in pre-trial detention and after sentencing. These practices patently aim to undermine freedom of conscience, academic freedoms, and the work of human rights defenders.

Cases such as Patrick Zaki’s and those of thousands of prisoners of conscience in Egypt suggest that authorities are failing to uphold the principles of academic freedom and of legitimate academic activity that are enshrined both in several international treaties to which the Egyptian government is a signatory and in Egyptian law itself, and instead that the treatment of human rights defenders is being guided by the objective of repressing dissent. Alaa Abd El-Fattah, for example, remains in prison, and the Egyptian government has yet to cooperate with investigations into the torture and assassination of Giulio Regeni.

We call upon Egyptian authorities to immediately release *all* human rights defenders, peaceful protesters and critics of the Egyptian government, to drop all charges against them, and to uphold internationally recognized standards in the respect of human rights.

Yours sincerely,



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