



# BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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

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President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi  
Arab Republic of Egypt

Chancellor Hamada El-Sawy  
Office of the Public Prosecutor

Prime Solicitor-General Khaled Diauddin  
Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Arab Republic of Egypt

c/o Ambassador Nasser Kamel  
Embassy of Egypt in London  
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15 July 2021

Dear Mr President,

I write on behalf of the Academic Freedom Committee of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our deep concern about the arrest and interrogation of our respected academic colleague Dr Alia Mossallam, an EUME (Europe in Nahen Osten) Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Berlin, Germany.

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, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region, both in the UK and globally.

We understand that Dr Alia Mossallam was detained on Sunday, 11 July 2021, as she disembarked a plane from Berlin with her husband and three children. It has been reported



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that she was held at the airport for 17 hours during which time she was subjected to repeated interrogations by National Security Agency officials. We understand that, after being held incommunicado for several hours, she was taken to the State Security Prosecution office, and released on bail on the morning of 12 July 2021.

Dr Alia Mossallam obtained her PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 2013. She is well-known in the United Kingdom and held in high regard by many in Middle East Studies in Europe and the United States. She is esteemed as one of the best of a new generation of researchers internationally, and has done creative and important work on the history of modern Egypt and of Nasserism. Many of us have been shocked and dismayed to hear of her interrogation by the Egyptian State Security. We are concerned about the infringement of her rights, and her academic freedom, and about the considerable distress caused to her and her family. We would like to draw your attention to the significant damage that this action is doing to Egypt's international reputation, in the academic community and more widely.

We are furthermore deeply concerned by the detention and interrogation of Dr Mossallam as we see it fitting into a noticeable trend of arresting Egyptian academics who are either studying or working abroad. We wrote to you in February 2020, about the arrest of Mr Patrick Zaki, an Egyptian student pursuing an MA at the University of Bologna. He is still in detention with no apparent signs of an imminent release. We also wrote to you in March 2021 about the arrest in January this year of Mr Ahmed Samir Santawy, an MA student in the Central European University, Vienna. Two weeks ago, he was given a four-year prison sentence.

We understand that a number of UK universities are to open branches in the New Administrative Capital, including Coventry University. However, the detention and interrogation of Dr Mossallam, coming as it does in the wake of other similar incidents, sends a stark signal to the UK academic community that academic freedom is under attack in Egypt. Accordingly, many of these UK universities may find it difficult to move ahead with their plans to open branches in Egypt.

We understand that following her interrogation, Dr Mossallam's name was added to Supreme State Security case no. 65 of 2021. We understand that all previous defendants mentioned in this case, including Mr Ahmed Samir Santawy, have been arrested and charged in violation of

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basic legal principles guaranteed by Egyptian law. We therefore request that Dr Mossallam's name be removed from this case, and that all charges brought against her be dropped, and that she be allowed to travel freely to Germany to resume her post-doctoral fellowship at the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Berlin.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor The Baroness Afshar OBE**

President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom