



# BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

E-mail: [administrator@brismes.org](mailto:administrator@brismes.org) Website: [www.brismes.ac.uk](http://www.brismes.ac.uk)

BRISMES Administrative Office, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL

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His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi  
President, Arab Republic of Egypt  
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Chancellor Hamada El-Sawy  
Office of the Public Prosecutor  
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Prime Solicitor General Khaled Diauddin  
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Foreign Minister Mr Luigi Di Maio  
Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale  
Piazzale della Farnesina, 1  
00135 Rome  
Italy

High Representative and Vice-President of the EU Commission Mr Josep Borrell  
EEAS Building  
9A Rond Point Schuman  
1046 Brussels  
Belgium

Friday, 14 February 2020

Dear President al-Sisi, Members of Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Arab Republic of Egypt,

Dear Foreign Minister Di Maio and High Representative Borrell,

I write on behalf of the Academic Freedom Committee of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our deep concern regarding the arrest and detention of Cairo University's Mr Patrick Soliman Zaki.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest 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.

Mr Patrick George Zaki is an Egyptian student currently enrolled on the EU Erasmus Mundus-funded GEMMA Masters programme at the University of Bologna, as well as a human rights defender working for the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). Mr Zaki was reportedly detained at Cairo airport

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Registered Charity Number 289804

VAT Registration Number 828 5681 90

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Baroness Afshar

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Dr Nicola Pratt

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upon his return from the University of Bologna on the night between February 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, as he was heading home to visit his family. Mr Zaki later appeared before the public prosecutor in Mansoura, his hometown. The charges directed against him are: 1. Publication of false news aiming to disturb social peace and spread chaos; 2. Incitement to protest without authorities' permission with the objective of subverting state institutions; 3. Instigation to overthrowing the Egyptian government; 4. Managing a social media account aiming to subvert social order and public security; 5. Instigation of violence and terrorist crimes.

Mr Zaki's arrest appears in a troubling line of similar incidents, including the arrests of Professors Hasan Nafaa, Hazem Hosni and Magdi Kerqar (Cairo University), as well as lawyers in defence of arrested individuals such as Mahienour El-Masry (arrested on 22 September, after attending the questioning of the those arrested after the protests of 20-21 September 2019) or Mohammed Al-Baqer (lawyer and the Director of Adalah Centre for Rights and Freedoms, issued with an arrest warrant while representing activist Alaa Abdel Fattah).

Moreover, in these cases like Patrick Zaki's, there are also worrying reports that those held in pre-trial detention are being denied access to their families or legal representation, or that such access has been limited to the point of insignificance. In Mr Zaki's case, for instance, it appears he was allowed access to his lawyer and to family members for a total of two minutes each. Such a limited amount of time makes the preparation of a full legal defence impossible.

We are also deeply concerned that Mr Zaki, like many others who have been detained, may have been subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment. Several detainees, including Al-Baqer and Abdel Fattah, report being subjected to so-called "prison reception", which involves being blindfolded, stripped naked, beaten with sticks, humiliated, and insulted. In Mr Zaki's case, there are reliable reports of his being beaten and electrocuted in the first 20 hours between his detention and the formalisation of his arrest.

BRISMES also notes that for the past seven years, many voices have been raised in protest at the Egyptian government's repeated violations of basic academic, civil and human rights. In April 2019, Scholars at Risk (SAR) and the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) in Egypt issued a report that highlighted attacks and pressures on higher education in Egypt. The report detailed a number of incidents involving violence, wrongful arrests, and university disciplinary proceedings against scholars and students and highlighted Egypt's Law Regulating Universities which, among other provisions, shifts certain vaguely defined crimes or attacks on universities to the jurisdiction of military courts, thus limiting due process protections.

These actions taken against Mr Zaki and others by Egyptian security forces violate international norms and standards of human rights, to which the Egyptian government is a signatory, as well as Egyptian law

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itself. To flourish, academic freedom requires freedom of the press and expression, respect for the rule of law, and transparency.

We call upon Egyptian authorities to immediately release Mr Zaki and all other peaceful protesters and critics of the Egyptian government, and to drop all charges against them.

In addition, we believe the pattern of violations of human rights currently evident in Egypt also violates the commitment to fundamental values and to human rights which are enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty, which the Union has a legal obligation to pursue in all its actions, and which are also part and parcel of its Partnership Agreements, including with Egypt. Based on the conditionality principles at the heart of the European Neighbourhood Policy, we call on the EU to press upon the Egyptian government to live up to those commitments, and urge the Union to implement those agreements if necessary by curtailing the speed and depth of economic ties with Egypt.

Likewise, we call upon the Italian government and European institutions to exercise the legal and diplomatic instruments and the commercial pressure available to them, to press upon the Egyptian government the importance of guaranteeing the human rights of Mr Zaki and of others like him, and to press other Member States to respect the spirit and letter of the Neighbourhood Policy.

Sincerely,

Professor the Baroness Afshar OBE  
President, BRISMES  
on behalf of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom