

**Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO)
British Society for Middle East Studies (BRISMES)**

Open Letter Regarding the Sentencing of Alaa ‘Abd EI-Fattah

*President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President Al-Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Email: p.spokesman@op.gov.eg
Twitter: @AlsisiOfficial*

Your Excellency,

The Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO) was established in 1995 and is the leading national association for the scholarly study of the Middle East and North Africa. Its Committee for Academic Freedom (CAF) defends academic freedom, understood as the inalienable right to the transmission and circulation of research and of knowledge. Its remit is also to defend human rights related to academic freedom, which include the rights to education, work, movement, residence, manifestation of thought, assembly and protest, as established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Art. 15.3) and in the Italian Constitution (Art. 33). The Committee monitors governmental actions of censorship and restriction of research independence, on mobility, prosecution, and extrajudicial imprisonment and elimination of individuals on the basis of their scholarly activity. Founded in 1973, the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) is the largest academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. BRISMES is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and as part of its remit to advance the knowledge and study of the region both in the UK and globally.

It is within these remits that we write to you urgently in relation to the sentencing of writer and activist Alaa ‘Abd EI-Fattah. Mr ‘Abd EI-Fattah was arrested in 2019 and held in remand detention for two years pending investigations conducted by the Supreme State Security Prosecution. He was charged with “joining a terrorist group, spreading false news and misusing social media.” Such charges are routinely leveled against democratic political activists. Mr ‘Abd EI-Fattah was detained for five years and was set to be released on September 29. However, authorities have refused to count the two years he spent in remand detention as time served in the course of his sentence. This violates Egyptian law, which mandates that time served in pre-trial detention be deducted from eventual sentencing.

Alaa ‘Abd EI-Fattah has now spent the near totality of the last ten years – and the last 52 consecutive months – in prison, arbitrarily detained for simply exercising his human rights,

including the free, peaceful and democratic manifestation of dissent from political authorities. These rights are guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Egypt has signed, ratified and which entered into force decades ago.

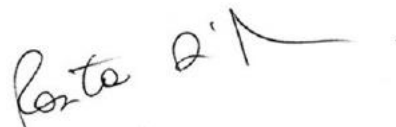
Both the trial and the detention of Mr 'Abd El-Fattah have been tainted by a notorious litany of abuses, both legal and physical (e.g. see our previous letter of October 2021). Despite never displaying the slightest violent behaviour, following his arrest in 2019 and until May 2022, Alaa 'Abd El-Fattah was held at the Tora Maximum Security 2 Prison. There he faced inhumane conditions, being detained in a small, poorly ventilated cell, repeatedly being denied a bed, a mattress as well as reading materials, exercise, adequate clothing, radio, watches, access to hot water and to all personal belongings. He also appears to have been repeatedly subject to physical abuse. He was only transferred after widespread public outcry at the treatment meted out to him. Mr 'Abd El-Fattah, who is a dual Egyptian-British citizen, continues to be refused consular visits.

We note that cases such as Mr 'Abd El-Fattah's have come to the attention of the UN Human Rights Committee, which has highlighted several issues relating to Egypt's compliance with its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights highlighting, including arbitrary detention and abuse of counterterrorism legislation to silence critics of Egyptian authorities. Mr 'Abd El-Fattah's case is also under consideration by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

As international academics, we hold Egyptian authorities responsible for the arrest and continued detention of Alaa 'Abd El-Fattah.

We call on you to count his pretrial detention as time served and bring about his immediate release.

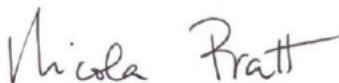
Sincerely,



Professor Rosita Di Peri
SeSaMO President



Dr Maria Chiara Rioli
Chair of SeSaMO Committee on Academic Freedom



Professor Nicola Pratt
BRISMES President



Dr Lewis Turner
Chair of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom