



# BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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

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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](mailto:fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk)

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Mr Hamish Falconer MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan

**Sent by Email:** [hamish.falconer.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:hamish.falconer.mp@parliament.uk)

14 October 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

Dear Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State,

We write on behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to request that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office urgently lobby the Egyptian government for the immediate and unconditional release of British 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. This is an issue in which we have been engaged for several years, and [previously](#) wrote to your predecessors about this matter.

Writer and activist Alaa Abd El-Fattah has long been recognised as a leading voice for human rights and democracy, with his Manalaa blog winning the Special Reporters Without Borders Award in 2005. He was a leading figure in the 2011 popular uprising against authoritarian rule in Egypt and has been arrested several times for his opposition to the regime. Most recently, he 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 levelled against democratic political activists in Egypt. Mr Abd El-Fattah was detained for five years and was set to be released on September 29, 2024. However, authorities have refused to count the two years he spent in remand detention as time served in the course of his sentence, despite this violating Egyptian law.

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His arbitrary detention for simply exercising his human rights, including the free, peaceful and democratic protest, violates both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Having spent nearly the totality of the past ten years imprisoned, Mr Abd El-Fattah has faced a litany of [well-documented](#) physical and legal abuses.

Alaa's family has fought for his freedom for years both in Egypt and in the UK - including several demonstrations and a sit-in in front of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office under the previous government, but to no avail. Alaa has been separated from his 12-year-old son Khaled for much of the boy's life. Khaled, who now lives in the UK, deserves to spend what remains of his childhood with his father. In November, 2022, Mr Lammy [tweeted](#) calling on the British government to take more direct action to "bring Alaa home", recognising the UK government's responsibility to protect its citizens from arbitrary detention and human rights abuses abroad. Despite this, since coming to office, Mr Abd El-Fattah's family has [expressed concern](#) about your department's lack of progress on this matter. We write to you with particular urgency due to Mr Abd El-Fattah's mother, Professor Laila Soueif, beginning a hunger strike that she will continue until her son is released. Her personal sacrifice reflects the importance and urgency of this case.

In the context of positive relations between your office and your Egyptian counterparts, we urge you to apply all possible pressure to secure Mr Abd El-Fattah's immediate and unconditional release.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Nicola Pratt**  
BRISMES President

**Dr Lewis Turner**  
Chair, BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

To read previous letters and statements from BRISMES CAF, please visit:

[Committee on Academic Freedom](#)

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