



# BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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29 November 2020

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 concerns about the ongoing detention of Dr Ahmed Tohamy, Assistant Professor of Political Sciences in the Faculty of Economic and Political Sciences, Alexandria University, and Mr Patrick George Zaki, a student at the University of Bologna.

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 Tohamy was detained on 3 June 2020 and has subsequently been charged with membership of a terrorist organisation, with spreading false information and with abusing the use of social media, and that these charges have been linked to the case of Mohamed Sultan, now living in the USA, who is pursuing an action against the former Egyptian Prime Minister Hazem el-Beblawi. We further understand that since being arrested, Dr Tohamy's detention has been extended by the court in his absence, and that he continues to be detained in unacceptable conditions, without access to his lawyer and with no exercise or family visits permitted.

Dr Tohamy, who holds a PhD from Durham University, UK and is a former BRISMES member, is a leading academic in his field, who has worked at Alexandria University since 2014, and previously held positions at the National Center for Social and Criminological Research, Cairo, at the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, and at the Free University of Berlin.

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Mr Zaki was detained on 7 February 2020, after returning to Egypt from Italy for a family visit. We previously wrote to you on 14 February 2020 to express our concerns about his arrest and the conditions of his detention and to call for his immediate release. We are very troubled that Mr Zaki's detention was renewed again on 22 November for another 45 days.

No evidence has been produced to support the charges that have been brought against Dr Tohamy or Mr Zaki. These incidents have accordingly reinforced a growing impression among BRISMES members and others that the Egyptian authorities are currently failing to accord the necessary respect for the principles of academic freedom and legitimate academic activity that are demanded both by Egyptian law and by the various international treaties to which your government is a signatory. We call upon you to order the immediate release of Dr Tohamy and to allow him to return to his employment at Alexandria University. Similarly, we call upon you to order the immediate release of Mr Zaki and allow him to return to his studies at the University of Bologna.

Yours sincerely,

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