



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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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 Mohamed Ashraf M Kamal Elkholy
Embassy of Egypt in London
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9 March 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 ongoing detention of Ahmed Samir Santawy, a master's student in Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Central European University (CEU) in Vienna, Austria, whose academic work focuses on women's rights in Egypt, particularly in the field of reproductive rights.

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 Ahmed Samir Santawy was arrested on 1 February 2021 and was subsequently transferred to Liman Torah Prison on 6 February 2021, where he was charged with 'joining a terrorist organization', 'deliberately spreading false news and data', and 'use of a private account on the Internet to spread false news or data'. We understand that his detention was renewed on 17 February without him or his lawyer being allowed to attend the hearing. We further understand that on 23 February 2021, Ahmed Samir Santawy was presented before the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) for a 'continuation of investigations' hearing and was charged with 'funding a terrorist organization' in addition to the charges already brought against him. In the meantime, he has been held in solitary



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confinement and suffered ill treatment in unacceptable conditions, without being allowed access to his family or to money provided by them for the purchase of food in accordance with prison regulations.

No evidence has been produced to support the charges that have been brought against Ahmed Samir Santawy, whose case bears a disturbing resemblance to that of Mr Patrick George Zaki, a student at the University of Bologna, and that of Dr Ahmed Tohamy of Alexandria University, about whom we wrote to you on 14 February 2020 and on 29 November 2020. This series of incidents has again 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 accordingly call upon you to:

- i. Immediately and unconditionally release Ahmed Samir Santawy, Ahmed Tohamy and Patrick George Zaki and drop all charges against them;
- ii. End all acts of harassment against Ahmed Samir Santawy, Ahmed Tohamy and Patrick George Zaki, as well as of all academics in Egypt, and ensure that they are able to carry out their academic activities without hindrance and fear of reprisals;
- iii. Ensure the physical integrity and psychological well-being of all detained academics in Egypt, and guarantee them unhindered access to family members and to lawyers of their choice; and
- iv. Carry out an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into alleged acts of ill-treatment against Ahmed Samir Santawy, Ahmed Tohamy and Patrick George Zaki in order to bring all those responsible before a competent tribunal in accordance with international standards.

Yours sincerely,

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