



# BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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

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 Professor Hasan Nafaa, Professor Hazem Hosni and Professor Magdi Kerqar in the wake of the 20 September protests against your government. 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.

Professor Hasan Nafaa of Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science is a highly respected political scientist and commentator. He has been accused of "participating in a terrorist group" and "spreading false news", amongst other criminal charges. Similarly, Professor Hazem Hosni, also a Professor in Cairo University's distinguished Faculty of Economics and Political Science, was arrested and detained for "participating in a terrorist group", "spreading false news" and using social media to spread rumours. In both cases, these individuals are being

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punished for exercising their freedom of opinion – a constitutional right -- on social media. Another Cairo University professor active in electoral politics, Professor of Urban Planning Magdi Kerqar, has also been arrested. We are concerned that terrorism-related legal instruments are being used to prevent and repress the manifestation of dissent and dissatisfaction with the current government.

Moreover, there are worrying reports that those held in pre-trial detention are being denied access to their families or legal representation and that the latter have been harassed or themselves arrested. For example, lawyer Mahienour El-Masry was arrested on 22 September, after attending the questioning of the first wave of those arrested after the protests of 20-21 September. Mohammed Al-Baqer, a lawyer and the Director of Adalah Centre for Rights and Freedoms, was also issued with an arrest warrant while representing activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, who in turn has been re-arrested. We are also concerned that those 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. Detention conditions are widely reported to include denial of medication and books.

These appear not to be isolated incidents. For the past six years, many voices have been raised in protest at your 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 mentioned in particular Egypt’s Law Regulating Universities which, among other provisions, shifts certain vaguely defined crimes or attacks on universities to the jurisdiction of military, rather than civilian, courts, thus limiting due process protections. In addition, the report detailed a number of incidents involving violence, wrongful arrests, and university disciplinary proceedings against scholars and students.

We believe this treatment of dissent to be illegal, unwise and ultimately ineffective. These actions by Egyptian security forces violate international norms and standards of human rights as well as Egyptian law itself. To flourish, academic freedom requires freedom of the press and expression, respect for the rule of law, and transparency. We call upon you to immediately release Professors Nafaa, Hosni and Kerqar and all other peaceful protesters and critics of your government detained in mass arrests, and to drop all charges against them.

Sincerely,

Nicola Pratt, Vice-President,  
on behalf of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom