

Advocacy dossier

Ahmed Gamal Ziada

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At liberty **Egypt**

Ahmed Gamal Ziada is an Egyptian journalist and editor of Zawia3, living in exile in Belgium since 2019, who was held in pretrial detention in 2013 to 2015 and again in 2019. In August 2023 security forces arrested his father in reprisal for his reporting; his father was released in September 2023 but the case against him remains open.

01

The case at a glance

Ahmed Gamal Ziada is an Egyptian journalist and editor of Zawia3, living in exile in Belgium since 2019, who was held in pretrial detention in 2013 to 2015 and again in 2019. In August 2023 security forces arrested his father in reprisal for his reporting; his father was released in September 2023 but the case against him remains open.

Status	Arrested	Country
At liberty	**29 Jan 2019**	**Egypt**

Charges
Illegal assembly (2013 case, acquitted)
Assaulting police officers (2013 case, acquitted)
Spreading false news (2019 case)

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Immediately end all harassment, summons, surveillance, and threats against the family of Ahmed Gamal Ziada in Egypt.

02 Cease the use of family members as leverage to pressure Ahmed Gamal Ziada into silence.

03 Drop any fabricated charges against family members and unblock their travel, financial, and professional rights.

04 Comply with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which explicitly prohibits reprisals against the families of defenders.

05 Immediately end all transnational targeting of Ahmed Gamal Ziada, including surveillance, defamation campaigns, Interpol misuse, and consular harassment.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Criminalisation of solidarity International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 21, 22
UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 5

Defamation and smear campaign International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 17
UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Denial of family visits UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rule 58

Enforced disappearance International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 9, 16

Forced exile International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 12(4)

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

Press freedom violation International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19

Reprisal against relatives UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Threats and intimidation UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Transnational repression UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

03

How the case unfolded

28 December 2013

Arrest

Arrested covering protests at Al-Azhar University

Ahmed Gamal Ziada was arrested while covering clashes at Al-Azhar University as a photojournalist for the Yaqeen news network. His camera was seized and he was charged with illegal assembly and assaulting police.

2015

Acquittal

Acquitted in the Al-Azhar case

The court acquitted him in the case over his Al-Azhar coverage.

2015

Release

Released after more than a year in pretrial detention

He was released after 16 to 18 months in pretrial detention. He has said he was tortured in detention.

29 January 2019

Arrest

Detained at Cairo airport on return from Tunisia

Security officers stopped him at Cairo International Airport on his return from Tunisia, where he had been reporting for Inkyfada. He was held incommunicado and his whereabouts were unknown for about two weeks.

13 February 2019

Reappearance in custody

Reappears before prosecutors; charged with false news

He reappeared before prosecutors and was charged with spreading false news. His detention was extended on 16 February.

March 2019

Conditional release

Released on bail

A court ordered his release on bail of EGP 10,000 on 2 March 2019, and he was freed in March. Some sources date his release to April 2019.

December 2019

Departure into exile

Leaves Egypt for Belgium

He left Egypt for Belgium, where he has lived and worked in exile since.

2023

Defender activity

Founds Zawia3 in Brussels

He founded the investigative news website Zawia Thalitha (Zawia3) in Brussels.

22 August 2023

Context

Father arrested in reprisal for his journalism

Plainclothes security officers arrested his father near his workplace. They took his phone and drove him to an undisclosed location, where he was blindfolded, handcuffed and questioned repeatedly about his son's journalism. One interrogator called his son the fleeing journalist. His father has never been involved in political or human rights activity.

23 August 2023

Context

Father charged before the Supreme State Security Prosecution

His father was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution and charged with misuse of social media, spreading false news and belonging to a banned group, then ordered held for fifteen days pending investigation. The family was barred from visiting him.

20 September 2023

Context

Father released; his case stays open

The Supreme State Security Prosecution ordered his father's release on 19 September 2023, and he reached home early on 20 September. The case against his father stays open.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Ahmed Gamal Ziada continues to live in exile in Belgium, where Zawia3 is still publishing; the outlet tells readers in Egypt how to reach it despite blocking. No new action against him or his family has been reported since his father's release in September 2023, and the case opened against his father has not been reported closed.

Background and Work

Ahmed Gamal Ziada is an Egyptian journalist, investigative reporter, and human rights researcher. He is the editor-in-chief of Zawia3, an independent news website that publishes reporting on social, economic, and political rights in Egypt. His investigative work has been featured in *Masr Alarabia*, *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, and Al Jazeera. Before leaving Egypt, he worked as a human rights researcher with several Egyptian rights organizations. He is a consistent advocate for freedom of expression and the release of imprisoned journalists.

Zawia3 has published critical analysis of the Egyptian government's economic policies, the state of political freedoms, and the so-called national dialogue initiated by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. In the months leading up to the December 2023 presidential election, Ahmed wrote several articles documenting restrictions on political organizing, media, and civil society. The website has also published investigations into arbitrary detention and prison conditions.

Previous Arrests and Torture

Ahmed Gamal Ziada has been arrested twice by Egyptian authorities for his journalism. On 28 December 2013, he was arrested while covering protests at Al-Azhar University as a photojournalist for Yaqeen. He was held in pretrial detention for 16 to 18 months and subjected to physical violence and torture. He was acquitted and released in 2015. On 29 January 2019, he was detained at Cairo airport on his return from Tunisia, held incommunicado for about two weeks, and then charged with spreading false news. He was released on bail in March 2019.

Following his release in 2019, Ahmed left Egypt and relocated to Belgium, where he is pursuing studies in international relations and political science. He continues to report on human rights violations in Egypt and to advocate for press freedom from exile.

Arrest of His Father

On 22 August 2023, Egyptian security forces arrested Ahmed's father near his workplace. Plainclothes officers detained him without presenting an arrest warrant. They confiscated his mobile phone and took him to an unknown location. During interrogation, he was blindfolded and handcuffed. Officers questioned him repeatedly about his son's journalism. One interrogator referred to Ahmed as "the fleeing journalist" and accused him of inciting dissent against the state.

He uses social media exclusively to promote his business. He has no history of involvement in human rights work, political activism, or prior arrest. His detention appears to have been carried out solely because of his family relationship to Ahmed.

Charges and Detention Conditions

His father was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution and charged with three offenses: misuse of social media, spreading false news, and belonging to a banned group. He was ordered held for fifteen days pending investigation. His family was denied permission to visit him, despite his documented medical conditions and the family's concerns for his health.

The charges against Gamal mirror the language routinely used by Egyptian prosecutors to detain journalists, activists, and human rights defenders. In this case, they have been applied to a man with no public profile, no history of political activity, and no connection to journalism beyond his son.

Transnational Repression and Family Targeting

The arrest of his father follows a well-documented pattern of Egyptian authorities targeting the relatives of exiled dissidents, journalists, and human rights defenders. By detaining family members inside Egypt, the state seeks to pressure or silence critics living abroad. Relatives have been subjected to arrest, interrogation, prosecution, travel bans, and asset freezes as proxies for individuals beyond the reach of Egyptian security forces.

Ahmed Gamal Ziada's case is emblematic of this transnational repression strategy. His father's arrest occurred shortly after Ahmed published articles critical of the government in the lead-up to the December 2023 presidential election. The interrogation focused not on Gamal's own conduct, but entirely on his son's work. The detention serves as both punishment and warning.

International Context

Ahmed Gamal Ziada currently resides in Belgium, where he continues his journalism and his studies. His father was released in September 2023, but the case against him, on charges widely understood to be politically motivated, remained open as of September 2023. The case illustrates the extraterritorial reach of Egyptian state repression and the use of family members as instruments of coercion against exiled defenders.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/ahmed-gamal-ziada/

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