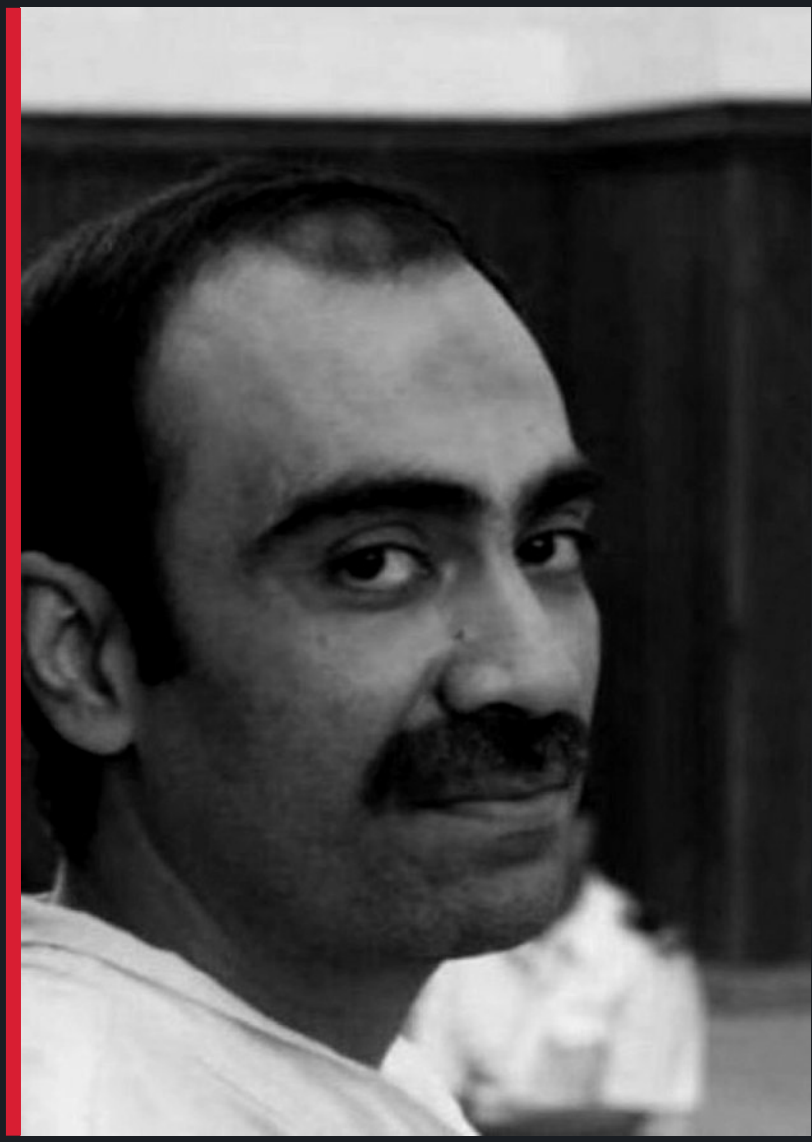


Advocacy dossier

Hamdi al-Zaeem

حمدى الزعيم

Detained (pretrial) **Egypt**

Hamdi al-Zaeem, also known as Hamdi Mokhtar, is an Egyptian freelance photojournalist held in pretrial detention since January 2021 and on trial before a Cairo terrorism circuit in Case No. 955 of 2020. Counting an earlier detention from 2016 to 2018, he has spent about ten years deprived of his liberty without a final conviction; his trial was adjourned on 27 September 2026 to 11 October 2026, and no later outcome has been confirmed by a trusted source.

01
The case at a glance

Hamdi al-Zaeem, also known as Hamdi Mokhtar, is an Egyptian freelance photojournalist held in pretrial detention since January 2021 and on trial before a Cairo terrorism circuit in Case No. 955 of 2020. Counting an earlier detention from 2016 to 2018, he has spent about ten years deprived of his liberty without a final conviction; his trial was adjourned on 27 September 2026 to 11 October 2026, and no later outcome has been confirmed by a trusted source.

Status	Arrested	Country
Detained (pretrial)	**4 Jan 2021**	**Egypt**

Charges
Joining a terrorist group
Participating in a criminal agreement to commit a terrorist offence

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Hamdi al-Zaeem immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

02

How the case unfolded

26 September 2016

Arrest

First arrested by state security

State security arrested Hamdi al-Zaeem in September 2016. He was held in pretrial detention in Case No. 15060 of 2016.

27 September 2016

Charge filed

Charged with spreading false news and belonging to a terrorist group

Prosecutors charged him with spreading false news, belonging to a terrorist group, harming national unity and inciting a protest without a permit.

23 June 2018

Conditional release

Released under precautionary measures

He was released from pretrial detention on condition that he report to a police station three times a week. The charges remained outstanding.

4 January 2021

Re-arrest

Re-arrested and held without contact with family or lawyer

Hamdi al-Zaeem was arrested again on 4 January 2021 and held for 12 days without contact with his family or lawyer before his first appearance before prosecutors.

16 January 2021

Pretrial detention ordered

Appears before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in Case No. 955 of 2020

He appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in Case No. 955 of 2020, was charged with offences including joining a terrorist group, and was ordered detained for 15 days pending investigation.

27 December 2021

Transfer between places of detention

Transferred from Tora Prison to Abu Zaabal Prison

He was transferred from Tora Prison in Cairo to Abu Zaabal Prison in al-Qalyubia governorate. He has diabetes, high blood pressure and a herniated disc.

January 2025

Referral to trial

Referred to trial with dozens of co-defendants

After four years of pretrial detention, well beyond the two-year maximum under Egyptian law, he was referred to trial together with dozens of other defendants in Case No. 955 of 2020.

25 March 2026

Hearing postponed

Trial session adjourned to 21 June 2026

The Second Terrorism Circuit of the Cairo Criminal Court adjourned the trial to 21 June 2026. AFTE reported that defendants could not be brought from prison and that the defence objected to the court limiting its questioning of a prosecution witness at the previous session.

21 June 2026

Hearing postponed

Fourth trial session adjourned to 27 September 2026

The Second Terrorism Circuit of the Cairo Criminal Court adjourned the fourth session of his trial to 27 September 2026 to hear the prosecution's pleading. The referral order in Case No. 955 of 2020, registered as Case No. 29 of 2025 Fifth Settlement felonies, accuses him of joining a terrorist group knowing its aims and of taking part in a criminal agreement to commit terrorist acts.

26 September 2026

Other act

Rights groups call for his release after ten years without freedom

Ahead of his trial hearing, CPJ, EIPR and other rights groups issued a joint statement condemning his prolonged pretrial detention, noting that no final conviction has been issued against him, and calling for his immediate release.

27 September 2026

Hearing postponed

Trial adjourned to 11 October 2026 as some defendants are not brought to court

The Second Terrorism Circuit of the Cairo Criminal Court, sitting at the Badr complex, rose before calling the case because security authorities had not brought some defendants to court. ECRF and AFTE reported that the trial was adjourned to 11 October 2026 for the prosecution's pleading; on the day, the defence told Al Manassa it had not yet been informed of the next date. He remains in pretrial detention.

03
The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Hamdi al-Zaeem remains in pretrial detention almost six years after his second arrest, while his trial in Case No. 955 of 2020 continues before the Second Terrorism Circuit of the Cairo Criminal Court. His session of 27 September 2026 was adjourned to 11 October 2026; trusted sources have not yet reported the outcome of that session.

Background and Work

Hamdi Mokhtar Ali, widely known as Hamdi al-Zaeem, is an Egyptian freelance photojournalist and producer whose work has appeared in local independent outlets, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). He is the father of four children and, according to the rights groups that have campaigned for him, the main provider for his family. His case is one of a number of prosecutions of Egyptian media workers that press freedom groups cite as examples of the use of pretrial detention against journalists.

The Arrests

Hamdi al-Zaeem was first arrested on 26 September 2016. CPJ reports that state security officers detained him while he was filming a documentary for the Al-Hayah channel about students cheating in final school examinations; the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF) place the arrest outside the Journalists Syndicate in Cairo. He was held in pretrial detention in Case No. 15060 of 2016 (Qasr El-Nil misdemeanours) and charged with spreading false news, belonging to a terrorist group, harming national unity and inciting a protest without a permit. In June 2018 he was released under precautionary measures that required him to report regularly to a police station. CPJ dates the release to 23 June 2018; ECRF gives 13 June 2018.

On 4 January 2021 he was arrested again. CPJ describes a raid on his Cairo home; EIPR says he was detained after leaving a police station where he had been complying with his precautionary measures. He was held for 12 days without contact with his family or lawyer before appearing before the Supreme State Security Prosecution on 16 January 2021. His family believes the new case is linked to the first one, according to CPJ.

Detention Conditions and Health

He was held at Tora Prison in Cairo until 27 December 2021, when he was transferred to Abu Zaabal Prison in al-Qalyubia governorate, according to CPJ. He has diabetes, high blood pressure and a herniated disc. A 2024 statement by Egyptian rights groups and public figures said his health had deteriorated in detention, and the joint statement of 26 September 2026 again raised his health and the burden on his family. His daughter, Mirna al-Zaeem, told ECRF that he had suffered a clot in prison that affected his leg and that his eyesight is weak.

Legal Proceedings

In the second case, prosecutors charged him with offences including joining a terrorist group and taking part in a criminal agreement to commit a terrorist offence; CPJ also lists spreading false news and misusing social media. His detention was renewed repeatedly for about four years, well

beyond the two-year maximum for pretrial detention under Egyptian law. In January 2025 he was referred to trial with other defendants in Case No. 955 of 2020, registered as Case No. 29 of 2025 Fifth Settlement felonies, before the Second Terrorism Circuit of the Cairo Criminal Court. The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) reports that the referral order is dated 1 January 2025, that the first session was held on 26 October 2025 and that the defendants denied the charges; AFTE follows his case together with that of a co-defendant, Alaa Mansour.

The trial has since been adjourned several times. On 25 March 2026 it was adjourned to 21 June 2026; AFTE reported that defendants could not be brought from prison and that the defence objected to the court limiting its questioning of a prosecution witness. On 21 June 2026 the fourth session was adjourned to 27 September 2026 to hear the prosecution's pleading. On 27 September 2026 the court, sitting at the Badr complex, rose before the case was called because some defendants had not been brought to court. His lawyer, Nabih El-Gendy, told Al Manassa that the defence had not yet been told the next date and that terrorism circuits now often adjourn for three or four months. ECRF and AFTE reported that the case was adjourned to 11 October 2026. AFTE further reports that the 11 October session was adjourned to 13 December, citing the continuation of the prosecution's pleading and the failure to bring some defendants; this has not been confirmed by a second source.

In late September 2026 he was reported to have said that he would stop attending his sessions from 1 October 2026, citing the new Code of Criminal Procedure. Days before that date, parliament postponed the code's entry into force by one year, according to EIPR.

International Response

On 26 September 2026, marking ten years since his first arrest, 16 organisations including CPJ, EIPR, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the El Nadeem Center, the Egyptian Front for Human Rights and ECRF issued a joint statement calling for his immediate release. They noted that no final conviction has been issued against him and that measures meant to be exceptional had become a long punishment. CPJ has profiled him among imprisoned journalists in Egypt, which it describes as one of the world's leading jailers of journalists.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/hamdi-al-zaeem/

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