HuMENA.

HM-EG-2020-003



Advocacy dossier

Marwa Arafa

مروة عرفة

Detained (pretrial) **Egypt**

A translator held since 2020 after supporting families of political detainees. She was arrested in front of her young daughter during the pandemic and disappeared for two weeks.

01

The case at a glance

A translator held since 2020 after supporting families of political detainees. She was arrested in front of her young daughter during the pandemic and disappeared for two weeks.

Status **Detained (pretrial)**	Arrested **20 Apr 2020**	Country **Egypt**
Charges Joining a terrorist group Financing a terrorist group		

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Marwa Arafa 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.

04 Provide Marwa Arafa with immediate, independent medical evaluation and the full treatment that condition requires, including transfer to an independent civilian hospital if necessary.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

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

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

Denial of legal counsel International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)

Denial of medical care UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rules 24 to 27

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

Inhumane detention conditions International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10
UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules)

Prolonged pretrial detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9(3)

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

How the case unfolded

April 2020

Transfer between places of detention

Held at Al Qanater Women's Prison

She was held in Al Qanater Women's Prison from April 2020, where officials reportedly failed to intervene when other prisoners attacked her.

20 April 2020

Arrest

Arrested at home without warrant

Security forces raided Marwa Arafa's home without presenting a judicial warrant and took her to an undisclosed location in front of her young daughter.

4 May 2020

Reappearance in custody

Reappeared before prosecution

After fourteen days of enforced disappearance, Marwa Arafa appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in Case No. 570 of 2020 and was placed in pre-trial detention on charges of joining and financing a terrorist group. Her trial later proceeded as case 19857 of 2024.

2023

Detention conditions and health

Denied postgraduate examination requests

Prison authorities began denying repeated requests by Marwa Arafa's family and lawyers to allow her to sit for postgraduate examinations, interfering with her right to pursue higher education while in detention.

July 2023

Transfer between places of detention

Transferred to 10th of Ramadan Prison

Marwa Arafa was transferred from Al Qanater Women's Prison, where she had been held since April 2020, to 10th of Ramadan Prison.

December 2024

Referral to trial

Supreme State Security Prosecution refers her to trial on terrorism-related charges

6 July 2025

Hearing

First trial session convened

After more than five years in pre-trial detention, Marwa Arafa's first trial session began before the First Terrorism Circuit of the Cairo Criminal Court. The court rejected defense requests for her release despite her detention exceeding the legal maximum.

August 2025

Medical care denied

Pulmonary embolism; outside hospital care refused

She suffered a pulmonary embolism linked to extreme heat and severe anaemia and collapsed in her cell. After one night in the prison hospital she was returned to her cell, and transfer to an outside hospital was refused. Since August 2025 she has also been denied daily exercise.

18 October 2025

Hearing

Hearing adjourned to December

She appeared in court visibly exhausted and with breathing difficulty. The hearing was adjourned to 20 December 2025 to question prosecution witnesses.

20 December 2025

Hearing

Police witnesses questioned

The court questioned police witnesses and adjourned the trial to 15 February 2026.

January 2026

Access to counsel denied

Prison denies her access to her lawyer

Amnesty International reported that the authorities of 10th of Ramadan prison were denying her access to her lawyer, and that she had also developed a heart condition requiring further tests that the prison hospital could not provide, while requests for transfer to an outside hospital were rejected.

30 September 2026

Context

Still held; next hearing set for 17 October 2026

Amnesty International reported that she was still detained and in deteriorating health, with the next hearing set for 17 October 2026.

3 October 2026

Context

Amnesty renews call for release before 17 October hearing

Amnesty International renewed its call for her immediate release, saying her health had seriously deteriorated, that she lacked the specialised care she needed, and that her next hearing before the Cairo Criminal Court was set for 17 October 2026.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked on 12 November 2026. Marwa Arafa remains detained at 10th of Ramadan prison, more than six years after her arrest; her trial before the Cairo Criminal Court continued with a hearing on 17 October 2026, and no verdict has been reported. Amnesty International reported in October 2026 that her health had seriously deteriorated and that she lacked specialised medical care.

Background and Work

Marwa Arafa is a translator whose civic engagement focused on supporting the families of individuals detained on political grounds. She helped cover the costs of prison visits for families who could not afford them and coordinated advocacy related to children's rights, particularly children affected by the detention of their parents.

Her case is part of a broader pattern in Egypt in which academics, researchers, and human rights defenders have been prosecuted under counterterrorism legislation and subjected to prolonged pre-trial detention as a de facto punitive measure.

The Arrest and Enforced Disappearance

On 20 April 2020, during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, security forces raided Marwa Arafa's home without presenting a judicial warrant. She was taken to an undisclosed location in front of her young daughter. For the next fourteen days, her whereabouts remained unknown. Her family filed complaints, but prosecutors did not investigate the disappearance.

She reappeared on 4 May 2020 before the Supreme State Security Prosecution and was assigned to Case No. 570 of 2020. She was placed in pre-trial detention on charges of joining and financing a terrorist group. She has remained in pre-trial detention since that day.

Prolonged and Unlawful Pre-Trial Detention

Marwa Arafa's detention has been renewed repeatedly and automatically, without meaningful judicial review. By September 2026, she had been held for more than six years, more than three times the two-year maximum limit prescribed under Egyptian criminal procedure law.

In July 2025, her trial began before the First Terrorism Circuit of the Cairo Criminal Court. She is being tried alongside dozens of co-defendants on charges related to alleged acts dating as far back as 2013. The court rejected defense requests for her release pending trial. Hearings have been repeatedly postponed.

Human rights organizations including the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and Amnesty International have documented violations of fair trial guarantees before terrorism circuits in Egypt, including the denial of public hearings before independent and impartial tribunals, inadequate access to defense, and breaches of equality of arms.

Detention Conditions and Health

Marwa Arafa was initially held in Al Qanater Women's Prison from April 2020 until July 2023, when she was transferred to 10th of Ramadan

Prison. At Al Qanater, prison officials reportedly failed to intervene when she was subjected to violence by other prisoners. Her requests to work in prison workshops for modest compensation were denied.

Since August 2025, authorities at 10th of Ramadan Prison have denied her daily exercise, in violation of Egyptian prison regulations and international standards on the treatment of prisoners. An independent physician consulted by her family confirmed that daily movement is medically necessary to prevent blood clots and further deterioration of her health.

In August 2025, she suffered a pulmonary embolism, with severe anaemia and respiratory distress. She collapsed in her cell and was briefly transferred to the prison hospital, which lacked adequate equipment and specialized staff. Despite ongoing symptoms consistent with a life-threatening condition, authorities have repeatedly refused to transfer her to an external hospital for proper diagnosis and treatment.

Prison authorities have required her family to provide medication and monitoring devices. Her lawyer has warned that the refusal to provide adequate medical care places her life at immediate risk. The continued denial of necessary care may amount to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Denial of Family Contact and Education

Marwa Arafa has been separated from her daughter since the child was very young. Restrictions on communication and visitation have deepened the separation, violating Marwa's right to family life and depriving her daughter of maternal care during critical developmental years.

Since 2023, repeated requests by her family and lawyers to allow her to sit for postgraduate examinations have been denied. Prison authorities have refused to implement prosecutorial authorizations granting legal visits by her lawyer. These measures represent unjustified interference with her right to pursue higher education while in detention.

Legal Violations

Marwa Arafa's case involves multiple violations of domestic and international law. She was subjected to enforced disappearance following her arrest. Her pre-trial detention has exceeded the legal maximum by more than four years. She has been denied adequate medical care, subjected to inhumane conditions of detention, and deprived of meaningful contact with her family and legal counsel.

Her trial has been marked by repeated delays and the rejection of release requests despite clear breaches of Egyptian criminal procedure law. The proceedings fail to meet international standards for fair trial guarantees under Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Egyptian authorities bear full responsibility for her health, safety, and fundamental rights for as long as she remains in custody.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/marwa-arafa/

HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement is a non-governmental organisation documenting the situation of human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa. This file is based on the public record of the case in the defenders archive.Status as recorded on 2020-05-04. To report an error: archive@humena.org