

Advocacy dossier

Patrick George Zaki

باتريك جورج زكى

At liberty **Egypt**

A researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, he was arrested in 2020 and convicted in 2023 for an article on Coptic Christian rights. He was pardoned the next day and released on 20 July 2023.

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The case at a glance

A researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, he was arrested in 2020 and convicted in 2023 for an article on Coptic Christian rights. He was pardoned the next day and released on 20 July 2023.

Status **At liberty**	Arrested **18 Jul 2023**	Country **Egypt**
Sentence Three years in prison. Sentence commuted by presidential pardon one day after conviction.		
Charges Publishing false news inside and outside Egypt Disseminating false news about the country's internal conditions that would disturb security and social peace		

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Immediately lift the travel ban imposed on Patrick George Zaki and on any family members affected by the same order.

02 Restore valid travel documents and remove any border-watch flags placed in connection with peaceful human rights work.

03 Comply with the ICCPR Article 12 guarantee of freedom of movement.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

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

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

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

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

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

Torture Convention against Torture, Articles 1, 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 7

Travel ban International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 12

Trial before an exceptional court International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

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

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How the case unfolded

7 February 2020

Arrest

Detained at Cairo airport

Patrick George Zaki was arrested by National Security Agency officers upon arrival at Cairo International Airport. He was taken to an undisclosed location and interrogated for several hours, during which he reported being subjected to electric shocks and physical beatings.

7 February 2020

Contact with the outside world cut off

Held incommunicado for 24 hours

Patrick was held incommunicado for 24 hours.

7 February 2020

Torture

Beaten, stripped and given electric shocks

During that time he was beaten, stripped of his clothes, given electric shocks, insulted and threatened.

8 February 2020

Pretrial detention ordered

Remanded in custody

The Public Prosecutor of Mansoura ordered his detention on remand for fifteen days. The detention order was subsequently renewed on a rolling basis for more than twenty months.

2 February 2021

Hearing

Detention renewed for 45 days

The Criminal Court of Cairo renewed his pretrial detention for an additional forty-five days, continuing a pattern of rolling renewals that had extended his detention without trial.

April 2021

Context

Italian Senate backs citizenship

The Italian Senate voted a motion asking the government to grant Patrick George Zaki Italian citizenship.

September 2021

Referral to trial

Referred to an emergency court on false news charges

In September 2021, his lawyers learned that he had been referred to an emergency state security court on false news charges.

14 September 2021

Hearing

Trial begins in emergency court

Patrick George Zaki's trial commenced before the State Security Misdemeanours Emergency Court in Mansoura. He was charged with publishing false news based on his 2019 article on the situation of Coptic Christians. The court operates without right of appeal.

7 December 2021

Travel ban imposed

Placed under a travel ban

When his release pending trial was ordered, he was placed under a travel ban.

7 December 2021

Release order

Release ordered after 22 months in detention

On December 7, 2021, following 22 months behind bars, he was ordered released from detention pending trial

8 December 2021

Release

Released pending trial

Patrick George Zaki was released from detention after spending more than twenty months in pretrial custody. His trial was set to resume in early 2022.

18 July 2023

Final judgment

Convicted and sentenced to three years

The Emergency State Security Misdemeanours Court in Mansoura convicted Patrick George Zaki of spreading false news and sentenced him to three years in prison. He was taken into custody on the day of the ruling. EIPR director Hossam Bahgat said no appeal was possible.

18 July 2023

Arrest

Taken into custody in the courtroom

Patrick George Zaki was taken into custody inside the courtroom immediately after the verdict.

19 July 2023

Pardon

Presidential pardon

President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi pardoned Patrick George Zaki one day after his conviction; Mohamed El-Baqer was pardoned the same day. The pardon did not annul the conviction.

20 July 2023

Release

Released under presidential pardon

Patrick George Zaki was released from detention following the presidential pardon. His release concluded nearly four years of judicial proceedings that began with his arrest at Cairo airport in February 2020, including 22 months of pre-trial detention.

23 July 2023

Travel ban lifted

Travel ban lifted; flies to Italy

His travel ban was lifted and he flew to Milan on a commercial flight, then went on to Bologna.

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The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked against current sources. Patrick George Zaki has been at liberty since his presidential pardon of 19 July 2023, after which his travel ban was lifted and he returned to Italy on 23 July 2023; no new proceedings against him have been reported. Mohamed El-Baqer was pardoned on the same day, and EIPR director Hossam Bahgat publicly confirmed that his conviction could not be appealed.

Background and Work

Patrick George Zaki is a researcher and human rights defender from Egypt. He worked with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), one of Egypt's leading independent human rights organizations. His research focused on gender rights, the rights of women, and the situation of marginalized communities including the LGBTQ+ population and Coptic Christians. He also documented violations of civil and political rights and worked on campaigns related to detention conditions and the treatment of political prisoners.

He belongs to Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, a community that has faced periodic violence and systematic discrimination. In July 2019 he published an article on the Daraj news platform titled "Displacement, Killing and Restriction: A Week's Diaries of Egypt's Copts," analyzing incidents of sectarian violence and restrictions faced by Copts. At the time of his arrest he was pursuing postgraduate studies in gender and women's studies at the University of Bologna in Italy.

The Arrest

On 7 February 2020 Patrick George Zaki arrived at Cairo International Airport for a short family visit. National Security Agency officers detained him immediately upon arrival. He was taken to an undisclosed location and interrogated for several hours without access to a lawyer. He later reported that during this interrogation he was subjected to physical beatings and electric shocks.

On 8 February 2020 the Public Prosecutor of Mansoura ordered his detention on remand for fifteen days. The detention was renewed repeatedly over the following months. He remained in pretrial detention for more than twenty months, during which his legal team faced obstacles in accessing case files and his family reported difficulties in securing regular visits.

Detention Conditions and Health

Patrick George Zaki was held in Tora Maximum Security 2 Prison in Cairo. Conditions in the facility have been documented by multiple organizations as failing to meet international standards. Prolonged pretrial detention without trial became a defining feature of his case, as the authorities continued to renew detention orders while the investigation remained open.

His family and legal representatives raised concerns about his physical and psychological well-being during the prolonged detention. Access to legal counsel was inconsistent, and the lack of clear trial dates compounded the uncertainty facing him and his family.

Legal Proceedings

On 14 September 2021 Patrick George Zaki's trial commenced before the State Security Misdemeanours Emergency Court in Mansoura. The charge against him was "publishing false news inside and outside Egypt." The basis for the charge was his July 2019 article on the situation of Coptic Christians. The State Security Emergency Court operates as an exceptional tribunal established under Egypt's longstanding state of emergency. Its verdicts are final and cannot be appealed.

On 8 December 2021 he was released from detention pending the continuation of his trial. The trial was scheduled to resume in February 2022. For more than a year and a half he remained free while the proceedings continued intermittently.

On 18 July 2023 the court convicted him and sentenced him to three years in prison. He was arrested inside the courtroom immediately following the verdict. The charge of disseminating false news has been used systematically by Egyptian prosecutors against journalists, researchers, and human rights defenders who publish critical analysis of the country's rights record.

Presidential Pardon and Release

On 19 July 2023, one day after the conviction, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi issued a presidential pardon covering Patrick George Zaki and five other individuals. He was released on 20 July 2023. The pardon did not annul the conviction or clear his record; it commuted the sentence.

The pardon came amid sustained international attention to his case. Universities, human rights organizations, and European institutions had called for his release throughout the proceedings. His case became emblematic of the broader crackdown on independent civil society and freedom of expression in Egypt, where emergency courts, prolonged pretrial detention, and charges of spreading false news have been used to silence critics and rights defenders.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/patrick-george-zaki/

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