Egypt | Rights Groups Call for End to State Harassment of Human Rights Defender Mohamed Abdel Salam and Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression

Joint Statements · Egypt · 23 July 2025

The undersigned human rights organizations call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately end all forms of harassment or intimidation against human rights defender Mohamed Abdel Salam, Executive Director of the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE), in retaliation for his legitimate human rights work. The organizations are also calling to ensure that AFTE is free to conduct its activities without any undue restrictions.

On 20 May 2025, police officers at Cairo International Airport detained Mohamed Abdel Salam for about an hour and confiscated his passport, without providing any legal justification. During his brief detention, he was questioned about his travel and human rights work. Upon release, the police instructed him to report to a National Security Agency (NSA) office in Cairo for further questioning, again without any legal basis provided.

On 23 May, Mohamed Abdel Salam received a call from an NSA agent who asked him to collect his passport from an agency office in Cairo. The agent claimed the confiscation of his passport had been an “unintended administrative mistake.” Mohamed Abdel Salam went to the NSA office and retrieved his passport without being questioned further.

This is not the first time the Egyptian authorities have targeted Mohamed Abdel Salam or AFTE. In 2018, airport authorities confiscated his passport and summoned him to the NSA without legal grounds. He was able to obtain a new passport in 2023. In November 2022, plainclothes police put AFTE’s Cairo office under surveillance for two weeks.

In May of this year, AFTE has attempted to submit its first request to receive funding to the Ministry of Social Solidarity, as Law No. 149/2019 (known as the 2019 associations law), which governs the operation of civil society organizations in Egypt, requires associations to obtain authorization prior to receiving funding, contrary to international law and standards. Despite submitting all required documents nearly two months ago, the organization has not received the approval yet, hindering AFTE’s ability to seek and use funds in order to pursue the associations’ activities.

AFTE has also encountered difficulties in maintaining a bank account since registering in 2023 under the 2019 associations law. After an eleven-month delay, a private bank finally opened an account for the organization. Under international law, states have an obligation to protect the right to freedom of association, including by removing any restrictions on the right imposed by the state

or other actors.

For over a decade, the Egyptian authorities have systematically targeted human rights defenders with criminal prosecutions, arbitrary travel bans, and asset freezes. To this day, authorities continue to impose travel bans on staff members from several independent NGOs, including lawyer Huda Abdel Wahab, co-founder of the Arab Centre for Independence of Judiciary and Legal Profession (ACIJLP), Gasser Abdel-Razek, Kareem Ennarah, and Mohamed Bashir, three directors of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR).

We call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately stop subjecting Mohamed Abdel Salam and other human rights defenders to harassment or intimidation for exercising their fundamental rights. Civil society actors must be able to operate freely, safely, and without fear of retaliation, in line with Egypt's constitutional and international obligations.

Signed,

- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Intersection Association for Rights and Freedoms
- Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI)
- Skyline International for Human Rights (SIHR)
- Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet)
- New Woman Foundation
- World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- MENA Rights Group
- Syria Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
- African Leaders Nexus
- Freemuse
- Malaysian Academic Movement (GERAK)
- MENA Prison Forum
- Right to Food Malaysia (HADAM)
- Salam for Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR)
- Cedar Centre for Legal Studies (CCLS)
- CIVICUS
- Access Now
- Committee for Justice

- Human Rights Watch
- Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)
- The Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)
- People in Need
- Lebanese Center for Human Rights
- Amnesty International
- Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
- Social accountability association
- Observatory of Violations of Freedom of Expression and Opinion – Tunisia
- The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
- Association Ifriqiya

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