

Counsellor Nabil Sadek
Public Prosecutor
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Madinat Al-Rehab
New Cairo
Arab Republic of Egypt

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**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

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Dear Counsellor

I am writing to express my deep concern about the hearing scheduled for 12 December at Cairo Criminal Court for Egyptian photojournalist Mahmoud Abd Alshakour Abu Zeid, widely known as Shawkan. He is at risk of life imprisonment on trumped-up charges stemming from his journalistic work. He will stand in a mass trial alongside 738 other defendants.

Nearly 90,000 people around the world have signed Amnesty International's [petition](#) calling for Mahmoud Abu Zeid's release. He is a prisoner of conscience arrested and detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. He must be released immediately and unconditionally, and all charges against him must be dropped.

Mahmoud Abu Zeid was arrested on 14 August 2013, while photographing the violent dispersal of the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in in Cairo. Security forces beat him severely upon his arrest, during his subsequent detention at a police station and following his arrival at Abu Zaabal Prison on 18 August 2013. Before he entered the prison that day, security forces also forced him to spend over seven hours waiting in a severely overcrowded police van in temperatures in excess of 40°C, without food, water or fresh air.

Since then, Mahmoud Abu Zeid has been held in pre-trial detention for over two years in contravention of Egyptian law that places a two-year cap, as well as international human rights law.

Article 143 of Egypt's Code of Criminal Procedures calls for the immediate release of a detainee who has been held in temporary detention for over two years without being sentenced. That two-year ceiling applies to suspects facing the most serious charges that could be penalised by life imprisonment or the death penalty. International law stresses that pre-trial detention shall not be a general rule regarding persons awaiting trial and should be a measure of last resort. There must be an ongoing examination of the continuing lawfulness and necessity of detention in each individual case.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concern over the Egyptian authorities' routine use of pre-trial detention as a mean of punishment rather than a precautionary measure. Shawkan is one among hundreds of individuals detained on this basis, in cases linked to peaceful freedom of expression and assembly.

Mahmoud Abu Zeid has also been tortured and ill-treated in detention. This flouts Articles 52 and 55 of Egypt's 2014 Constitution, as well as the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which Egypt acceded in 1986.

His lawyers have not been given full access to key documents, and he is facing a string of trumped-up and politically motivated [charges](#), which appear to be designed to punish him for documenting the violent dispersal of the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in, which led to the killing of more than 600 protestors in one day, according to the findings of the 30 June Fact-Finding Committee.

He is currently being held in a cramped cell with 12 prisoners, each with nothing but a thin mattress and cold, tiled floors to sleep on. "Our dignity was left at the prison gates," he wrote in a [letter](#) to Amnesty International. The prisoners may not see daylight or breathe fresh air for weeks at a time, and during winter months their only source of warmth is a single element cooker. Such poor conditions are contrary to international standards.

This 28 year-old-man should be set free, not languishing behind bars as his health deteriorates. He is suffering from Hepatitis C and has been denied access to essential medication. His lawyers have appealed to your office at least 17 times to release him on medical grounds without success.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has repeatedly stressed that Egypt is a country that respects free speech and media workers' right to freedom of expression. In July 2013, in his speech announcing the ousting of former President Mohamed Morsi, he stated that "today's Egypt will respect free speech and media". In August 2015, he stated that Egypt respects and appreciates the role of the media, and allows journalists to work without restriction, and in September 2015, he told CNN that there is "unprecedented freedom of expression in Egypt". Yet, today, there are at least 33 journalists held behind bars for peacefully doing their jobs as reporters, according to the Egyptian Press Syndicate.

We therefore urge you to release photojournalist Mahmoud Abu Zeid immediately and unconditionally, and drop all charges against him. His journalism is not a crime.

Yours sincerely

Said Boumedouha
Deputy Director
Middle East and North Africa Programme

