

THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE OF SWEDEN'S SCIENTIFIC AND LITERARY ACADEMIES

Stockholm 15 June 2021

Elisabeth Rachlew /ch

His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace, Cairo
Arab Republic of Egypt

Your Excellency,

We, the Human Rights Committee of Sweden's Scientific and Literary Academies, write respectfully to ask for your assistance with the situation of two Egyptian health professionals—Mohammed al-Sais and Mohammed Helmy Jouda—who have been in state custody for more than a year after speaking out about health and safety concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. al-Sais, a pharmacist, was taken into custody on April 4, 2020, after criticizing the Health Ministry's response to the COVID-19 pandemic on social media. He reportedly was forcibly disappeared for five days before being brought before the State Security prosecutor and remanded into detention. It is our understanding that Mr. al-Sais has been charged with spreading false news, joining a terrorist group, and using an account on social media for the purpose of broadcasting false information. Further we understand that his detention orders have been renewed repeatedly and that no indication has been given regarding when his case may be brought to trial. He is currently held in Tora Mazraa prison in a detention cell that reportedly is extremely crowded.

Mr. Jouda was taken into custody on May 21, 2020, by security forces at his home in Faisal, in the Giza governorate. We understand that, shortly thereafter, he was forcibly disappeared. Mr. Jouda's precise whereabouts have not been confirmed. We are particularly concerned about our colleagues' well-being in light of reports documenting lack of clean water and ventilation, poor sanitation, and severe overcrowding in Egyptian prisons.

The use of broad allegations of spreading false news and terrorism to arbitrarily detain health professionals who publicly and peacefully express their concerns about health and safety is inconsistent with Egypt's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We are also concerned that our colleagues are at increased risk of a COVID-19 infection while in detention. As you are no doubt aware, the World Health Organization and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights have called on governments to address the risks posed by the pandemic in detention settings, emphasizing that prisoners jailed for offenses not recognized under international law should be released with high priority.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully request you to use your good offices to ensure Mr. al-Sais's and Mr. Joudy's prompt and unconditional release, so that they can return to their much-needed work.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully yours,



Elisabeth Rachlew

Professor, Chairman of the Human Rights Committee



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Copy: His Excellency Sameh Hassan Shoukry Selim, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Embassy of Egypt in Stockholm, Sweden
The Embassy of Sweden in Cairo, Egypt