



BY PRIORITY MAIL

President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
H.E. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace,
CAIRO, EGYPT

Amsterdam, 26 September 2019
Per e-mail : p.spokesman@op.gov.eg

Subject: Arrest and detention of lawyer Mahienour El-Massry

Your Excellency,

Lawyers for Lawyers is an independent and non-political foundation that seeks to promote the proper functioning of the rule of law by pursuing freedom and independence of the legal profession.

Lawyers for Lawyers is concerned about the recent arrest and continued detention of human rights lawyer Mahienour Al-Massry in the Al-Qanater prison which seems to be connected to her legitimate activities as a lawyer.

According to public sources, on 22 September 2019, lawyer and human rights defender Mahienour El-Massry was arrested by security forces in plain clothes and forced into a van outside of the State Prosecution Office in Cairo. On 23 September 2019, the Supreme State Security Prosecution ordered 15 days of preventive detention for Mahienour El-Massry. She is facing charges of "joining an illegal group", "publishing false news", and "misuse of social media".

The arbitrary detention of Mahienour El-Massry seems to be connected to the demonstrations which began on 20 September 2019 demanding the resignation of the Egyptian president Abdelfattah Al-Sisi. Mahienour El-Massry represented nine detainees who had been arrested during these protests. According to the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms and other media accounts, hundreds of persons were arbitrary detained in Cairo, Alexandria, Damietta, Mahalla and Suez since the start of the demonstrations, including several human rights defenders. The Egyptian security forces responded to the demonstrations with tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition. The detained human rights defenders are facing several charges, including "joining illegal an organisation", "demonstration without a permit", and the "spread of false news".

Mahienour El-Massry is a prominent human rights lawyer known for her work to promote judicial independence and prisoners' rights. In 2014, she was awarded with the renowned Ludovic Trarieux Prize for her outstanding efforts to advance human rights. Unfortunately, this is not the first time Mahiebour el-Massry was arrested. Since 2014, she has spent lengthy periods in Egyptian prison under difficult circumstances.

Lawyers for Lawyers believes that these actions against Mahienour Al-Massry are part of a wider crackdown against human rights defenders and independent civil society organized by the Egyptian government.

In this context, we draw your attention to the United Nations (UN) Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (Basic Principles), more in particular Principles 16 and 23, which read:

16. Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference (...) and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

23. Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.

These principles are universally applicable. Therefore, your government is under an obligation to adequately protect and support its lawyers.

Further, as a member of the African Union and the UN, and as a party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Egypt has legal obligations to adopt measures that effectively ensure rights to liberty, freedom from arbitrary detention, freedom of expression, and fair trial. Also as a member of the United Nations, Egypt is expected to comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the various principles, guidelines, standards and recommendations adopted by the UN General Assembly and other UN bodies relating to these rights.

In view of the above, Lawyers for Lawyers respectfully urge you to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Mahienour Al-Massry and put an end to all acts of harassment against her, including at the judicial level;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Mahienour Al-Massry; and
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights lawyers in Egypt are able to carry out their legitimate professional rights and duties without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter. We are confident that the government of Egypt will give this case the attention it deserves and we will continue to monitor this case closely.

Yours sincerely,

LAWYERS FOR LAWYERS (L4L)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S de Graaf', written over a horizontal line.

Sophie de Graaf, Executive Director

Copies of this letter were sent to:

- Mr. Mohamed Fayeq, President of the National Council For Human Rights, Email: nchr@nchr.org.eg
- Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations in Geneva, Email: mission.egypt@ties.itu.int
- Embassy of Egypt in the Netherlands, Email: info@ambeg.nl
- Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cairo, Egypt, Email: kai@minbuza.nl