

SCHOLARS AT RISK

NETWORK  ITALY SECTION

Subject: Petition in support of Mr. Patrick George Zaki

To: His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
President, Arab Republic of Egypt
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +20-2-390-1998
Email: p.spokesman@op.gov.eg

Date: 19th March 2020

Your Excellency,

We write on behalf of our university communities in Italy to express grave concern for Patrick George Zaki, a postgraduate student at the University of Bologna who was arrested on February 7, 2020, and afterwards allegedly subjected to torture, in apparent retaliation for his activity as a researcher and a Human Rights defender.

We respectfully urge you to secure the immediate and unconditional release of Mr Zaki, allowing him to go back to resume his studies at the University of Bologna, and to permit the appropriate authorities to investigate his alleged torture.

Patrick George Zaki is a twenty-eight year old Egyptian student who came to Italy in August 2019, to pursue a master's degree on Gender Studies at the University of Bologna. Moreover, he is a researcher for the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), an organization based in Cairo committed to defending Human Rights.

We understand from Scholars at Risk (SAR), an international network of individuals and institutions committed to protecting scholars and promoting academic freedom – of which our universities are members – that Mr Zaki returned to Egypt for a brief family visit in Mansoura and that, upon his arrival at Cairo International Airport, he was stopped by the Egyptian National Security Agency (NSA). He subsequently disappeared for 24 hours. It has been reported that officers arrested and interrogated him for several hours without the presence of his lawyers in an unknown location.

During these 24 hours he was reportedly subjected to physical abuse and torture, including by electric shocks. The next day, the Public Prosecutor of Mansoura ordered his detention on remand for 15 days, detention that was confirmed on February 22 for another 15 days. According to Front Line Defenders, Mr Zaki was accused of ‘spreading false news,’ ‘incitement to protest without authorisation,’ ‘incitement to violence and terrorism,’ and ‘calling for the overthrow of the state.’

We further understand from SAR that Egyptian authorities presented a document stating that he has been detained because of an arrest warrant issued in September 2019, but they have not publicly disclosed the evidentiary basis for this decision so far.

In the absence of any information that may clarify our understanding of these events, the facts as described above suggest that Mr Zaki is detained in apparent retaliation for his nonviolent exercise of the right to freedom of expression, protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 19) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Egypt has ratified in 1982.

We are gravely concerned by Mr Zaki’s detention conditions. We learn from Front Line Defenders that Egyptian authorities limited his contact with his family and with his legal counsel, conditions that may affect the right of due process and a fair trial, according to the Article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We therefore respectfully urge you to intervene and ensure the unconditional release of Patrick George Zaki, to allow his return to Italy to continue his studies and to open an investigation on his alleged torture.

We appreciate your attention to this important matter and we look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



President European University Institute
Prof. Renaud Dehousse



Director Scuola Normale Superiore
Prof. Luigi Ambrosio



Director Scuola Internazionale Superiore di Studi Avanzati (SISSA)
Prof. Stefano Ruffo



University of Cagliari
Prof. Maria Del Zompo



University of Florence
Prof. Luigi Dei



University of Genoa
Prof. Comanducci Paolo



University of Padua
Prof. Rosario Rizzuto



University of Pavia
Prof. Francesco Svelto



University of Siena
Prof. Francesco Frati



University of Trento
Prof. Paolo Collini



University of Trieste
Prof. Roberto Di Lenarda



University of Udine
Prof. Roberto Pinton

CC:

The Honorable Michelle Bachelet
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Email: InfoDesk@ohchr.org

The Honourable Ambassador Mr Amr Mostafa Kamal Helmlly
Egyptian Embassy in Rome
Villa Savoia Via Salaria
267 00199 Roma Italy
Email: amb.egi@pronet.it
Fax: (+ 39) 06 855 44 24

Chancellor Hamada El-Sawy
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Fax: +20-2-25774716

Attorney General Khaled Diauddin
Supreme State Security Prosecution, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +20-2-26381956
His Excellency Mr. Alaa Youssef
Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations Office
Permanent Représentative
261, Route de Lausanne
1292 Chambesy
Email: mission.egypt@bluewin.ch
Fax: +41 22 738 44 15

The Honorable David Kaye
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and
expression
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 917 9006
Email: freedex@ohchr.org

The Honorable Michel Forst
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – Palais Wilson
United Nations Office at Geneva
CH 1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

The Honorable José Guevara Bermúdez
Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
8-14, avenue de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 9179006
E-mail: wgad@ohchr.org

The Honorable Stefania Pucciarelli
President of the Senate of the Italian Republic Commission for Human Rights
Senate of the Republic
Piazza dei Caprettari 79
00186 Roma – Italia
Email: stefania.pucciarelli@senato.it