

Brussels, 28/09/2021

Ms. Ursula Von Der Leyen

President of the European Commission

Sent via email to:

Ursula.VON-DER-LEYEN@ec.europa.eu

Mr. Josep Borrell

Vice President of the European Commission/High Representative

Sent via email to:

Josep.BORRELL-FONTELLES@ec.europa.eu

Object: the case of Patrick George Zaki and the crackdown on fundamental rights of peaceful opponents and critics in Egypt.

**To the President of the Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen,
To the Vice President of the Commission/High Representative Josep Borrell,**

We are writing to you with reference to the case of **Patrick George Zaki** and bring your attention to the intensifying crackdown on fundamental rights and the continued persecution of peaceful opponents and critics **in Egypt**.

We express our deepest concern regarding the ongoing detention and trial of Patrick George Zaki, a researcher at the University of Bologna, Italy, who was arrested upon his arrival in Egypt for a family visit on 7 February 2020. **His imprisonment began without any respect for the minimum standards of fundamental rights set out by international law and its trial seems to have presented many of the worrying signs that characterise the treatment reserved to political prisoners under the Al-Sisi regime.**

Zaki was initially charged with disseminating subversive propaganda, incitement to protest and instigation to terrorism, among other allegations. While the Egyptian authorities have produced no credible evidence to justify this measure, he has been held in pre-trial detention ever since, where he claims to have been threatened and subjected to torture during his interrogations.

Suspects in terror cases under the controversial state of emergency legislation introduced under the rule of President al-Sisi often do not receive fair trials and they are referred directly to the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP).

The first hearing of Patrick Zaki's trial took place only on 14 September 2021 in Mansura, Egypt, and lasted just over five minutes. Zaki is charged for “spreading false news inside and outside of the country”, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in jail, due to an article written by the researcher in which he gave a personal account of his hardships as a Copt in Egypt.

This exceptional court, where rulings cannot be appealed, should only try the most serious

terrorist crimes.

The case of Zaki does not only represents a negation of the right to a fair and just trial coupled with actual violations of human rights regarding imprisonment, investigation, and interrogation methods, but also shows how blatantly Al-Sisi's state of emergency powers have been misused to imprison and punish peaceful opponents and critics.

The counter-terrorism legislation, criticised by many human rights organisations for giving the authorities a dangerously large scope of interpretation, has been widely used by the Egyptian state authorities to silence not only human rights defenders, lawyers, activists and members of the opposition, **but also, as the stories of Patrick Zaki and Giulio Regeni bear witness, individuals not directly involved in political affairs.**

Treating peaceful opposition and the simple expression of opinions as a matter of national security or 'terrorism', the Egyptian authorities wish to create a climate of terror, which guarantees monolithic and silent support of the regime thus resulting in a systematic repression of freedom of expression.

The court was adjourned to today, September 28th, and it remains unclear how long it will take the exceptional court to reach a verdict.

Patrick Zaki moved to Europe to study the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies, **a project supported by the European Commission**, which involves seven universities in six EU Member States. The detention of Patrick George Zaki during the course of his fellowship in Europe represents a threat to the idea and principles at the basis of these projects, the promotion of the European Union core values.

As members of the European Parliament and representatives of the Union's citizens, the situation of Patrick Zaki concerns us all, and we ask the European Union to act in protection of the fundamental rights of one of its own students.

On 18 December 2020, the European Parliament passed a resolution concerning the deteriorating situation of human **rights urging member states and the European Union as whole for a cohesive and substantial response** for the worst cases of violations in Egypt, including the case of Patrick Zaki.

We, undersigned members of the European Parliament, are writing this letter to impress upon you the urgent need for the European Union to **use all its leverage and tools** in protection of Patrick George Zaki and all the prisoners of conscience of Egypt. We therefore call upon you, as Commission President and Vice President/High Representative, on behalf of the European Union:

- to urge political representatives of the European Union and its member states to prioritise this matter and **ensure that Patrick Zaki's fundamental rights are safeguarded from any violation.**
- to recall to the Egyptian authorities that freedom of expression and freedom of association are expressly protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is a party and **demand the end of the pre-trial detention and the immediate release of Patrick George Zaki and all political prisoner and prisoners of conscience;**

- to encourage representatives from the EU Delegation and the Member States in Cairo to **attend the trials of Patrick George Zaki** and of other Egyptian and foreign journalists, bloggers, trade unionists, human rights defenders and civil society activists in the country and visit them in detention;
- to publicly express concerns over the case of Patrick George Zaki and on the human rights situation in Egypt and at any high-level meeting with Egyptian authorities and **remind them that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms constitutes an essential element of EU-Egypt relations**;
- to call on the Member States to respond in a unified and resolute manner, also in coordination with other likeminded partners, to the crackdown and human rights violations in Egypt, and to use all tools at their disposal **to secure concrete progress in Egypt's human rights record**;

We hope in your strong support for this cause, and we avail this opportunity to convey our assurances of highest consideration,

Yours Sincerely,

Fabio Massimo CASTALDO, NI

Pierfrancesco MAJORINO, S&D

Salima YENBOU, Greens/EFA

Miriam LEXMANN, EPP

Chiara Maria GEMMA, NI

Rosa D'AMATO, Greens/EFA

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Anne-Sophie PELLETIER, The Left

Javier NART, Renew Europe

Alessandra MORETTI, S&D

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