

Egypt: Health of detained journalist Hisham Fouad deteriorates following hunger strike

Sunday 8 August 2021, by [International Federation of Journalists](#) (Date first published: 6 August 2021).

The health of Hisham Fouad, a journalist and activist detained for over 2 years is deteriorating after he staged a hunger strike. Fouad, who has been held since 25 June 2019, began a hunger strike on 10 July 2021. Placed in solitary confinement, his health is now in grave danger. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) condemns his arbitrary detention and calls on the Egyptian authorities to immediately release him and 26 other journalists currently detained in the country.

Hisham Fouad, along with other opposition figures, was arrested on charges of “*economic conspiracy*”. He has never been brought to trial despite the fact that the maximum period of two years in pre-trial detention has now been exceeded. Rather than releasing him as required by law, the authorities have started new investigations. To protest against his arbitrary detention and the inhumane conditions in which he is being held, Fouad went on hunger strike.

As soon as Hisham the action, the Egyptian authorities moved him into solitary confinement. Even though he has now ended the strike due to a rapid deterioration of his health, he is being kept in solitary and is being denied access to proper medical treatment.

Fouad’s case is indicative of the techniques used by the Egyptian authorities to silence critical journalists. Journalists are frequently detained on false charges for extended periods of time, and with new charges being brought in to justify the time spent in detention. This policy which is commonly known in Egypt as “*recycling*”, has been condemned in the past by the IFJ and other media organisations .

The latest journalist to be arrested in Egypt is Rabie al-Sheikh, who works for Al Jazeera. Authorities arrested him at Cairo airport soon after he arrived from Doha on 1 August. Rabie al-Sheikh has since been detained for 15 days and charged with “*spreading false news*”. He is the third Al Jazeera journalist currently detained in Egypt, after Hisham Abdel Aziz and Bahaa al-Din Ibrahim.

According to news reports, Rabie al-Sheikh’s arrest comes after the Egyptian security authorities leaked an audio recording of him inviting Abdel Nasser Salama, journalist and former editor-in-chief of the main state-owned newspaper al-Ahram, to an interview. Two weeks ago, on 18 July, Salama was arrested at his home on charges of spreading false news and financing and participating in a terrorist group. A few days earlier, he had written a Facebook post calling on President el-Sisi to resign for his mishandling of the negotiation with Ethiopia over the Nile River dispute.

IFJ General Secretary Anthony Bellanger said: “*Egyptian journalists and independent journalism have been facing the worst intimidation campaign in the history of the region. Dozens of our colleagues have spent years in jail, hundreds of independent media organisations have been shut down, bought up directly or indirectly by the state or driven to bankruptcy and thousands of critical journalists lost their jobs. It is time for this repressive regime to end the harassment. We call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately release all 26 colleagues currently held in prisons and to end these relentless attacks on journalists and freedom of expression.*”

For more information, please contact IFJ on +32 2 235 22 16

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