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Egypt

Solidarity won Adly's freedom

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Malek Adly, a well-known human rights lawyer and activist, emerged from an Egyptian prison in late August after spending three months in solitary confinement.

He had been held in pre-trial detention since he was arrested on May 5 for charges stemming from the April 25 protest against Egypt's ceding of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia. He was released after his lawyers successfully challenged a further extension of his pre-trial detention.

Adly's release came one week after leading lawyers from across Europe published an open letter condemning the horrific conditions in which Adly was being held. The letter also deplored the ongoing crackdown against lawyers and human rights activists, such as labor lawyer Haitham Mohamedain and Ahmed Abdallah, a legal adviser to the family of Giulio Regeni.

Adly is a founding member of the Front for Defending Egypt's Protesters, a group made up of 34 human rights organizations and independent lawyers that offers legal representation to peaceful protesters and documents illegal practices carried out by state security forces against those exercising their right to protest. During his pre-trial detention, Adly had been tortured, threatened with execution, subjected to routine physical abuse and denied adequate medical treatment.

Ever since President Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi seized power in 2013, the regime has ruthlessly repressed all dissent, arresting, detaining and jailing tens of thousands of activists and trade unionists. Key to this crackdown has been the use of the government's judicial branch to deploy the full weight of the legal and prison system against those who dare to exercise basic political liberties such as the right to strike and the right to protest.

Lawyers such as Adly bravely resisted this assault on civil liberties by defending those imprisoned during this crackdown, but now these lawyers themselves are being subjected to the same judicial denial of their rights for the "crime" of defending those unjustly imprisoned by the regime.

A statement of concern regarding Adly's treatment by the United Nations' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention puts Adly's treatment and the treatment of lawyers in general in the context of Egypt's ongoing crackdown on basic civil rights, in particular the right to protest.

Particularly relevant to Mr. Adly's arrest have been the measures taken by Egyptian authorities to severely crack down on all forms of critique and peaceful dissent in response the Egyptian government's decision to transfer the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to the government of Saudi Arabia...In the days leading up to the scheduled protests, security forces preemptively arrested at least 90 people in eight different governorates, many of them from local coffee shops...

On April 25, a heavy security and military presence prevented many of the scheduled peaceful demonstrations from taking place. Meanwhile, pro-government rallies were allowed to occur without interference. The few peaceful

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demonstrations that went forward and were critical of the government were violently dispersed with tear gas...

In the time since the April 15 and April 25 protests, hundreds of peaceful demonstrators have been arrested and sentenced, the Press Syndicate has been raided by police for the first time in the country's modern history, and the crackdown against civil society and independent voices has severely escalated.

Malek's release follows the release of Taher Mokhtar, an activist doctor whose pre-trial detention was also successfully overturned by lawyers, and two other lawyers—Mahienour el-Masry and Yousef Shaaban—were released after serving 15-month sentences.

Yet Egyptian authorities continue to hold thousands more in their dungeons. Haitham Mohamedain is among them, as are workers from the Alexandria Shipyard.

The verdict in the military trial of 26 Alexandria Shipyard workers will be announced on September 18, and Egyptian trade unionists and solidarity activists are issuing appeals for international solidarity. The shipyard workers were demanding better health and safety conditions, permanent contracts for temporary workers and the payment of overdue bonuses. These were the "crimes" that led to their military trial.

You can add to the global awareness of the campaign to defend the shipyard works by helping to spread the word.

Supporting Egyptian activists through international solidarity is critical. The Egyptian regime has shown that it's willing to shred any and all civil liberties as it constructs a "perfect" authoritarian state able to crush all dissent. International pressure can make them think twice.

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