

April 26, 2018

H.E. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Abdeen Palace
El-Gomhoreya Square
Rahbet Abdin, Abdeen
Cairo, Egypt

Your Excellency:

Re: Concerns regarding the disappearance and detention of lawyer Ezzat Ghonim

I write on behalf of the Law Society of Ontario* to voice our grave concern over the disappearance of lawyer Ezzat Ghonim. When serious issues of apparent injustice to lawyers and the judiciary come to our attention, we speak out.

According to reports, an Egyptian woman, Mona Mahmoud Mohammed was detained pursuant to an order by the public prosecutor following her criticism—which related to accusations against the police that they had tortured and raped her daughter—of the Egyptian police in an interview with the BBC, a foreign media outlet.

Ezzat Ghonim is a prominent human rights lawyer and director of the non-governmental organization, Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms. Ghonim publicly criticized Egyptian authorities for their handling of Ms. Mohammed's daughter. He was also the first to report the arrest of Mona Mahmoud Mohammed.

Following his public criticisms, Ezzat Ghonim did not return home on the evening of Thursday, March 1, 2018, and his cellular phone has been turned off. Family, friends and colleagues have been unable to contact him and his whereabouts were unknown; they assumed that he had been arrested, which has prompted concerns that his disappearance has been enforced, which, according to Amnesty International, is the method of choice for the authorities when they are looking to hide further abuses against dissidents, such as ill-treatment, torture and extra-judicial executions.

Reports indicate that on March 19, 2018 Ezzat Ghonim appeared in a video published by the Egyptian Interior Ministry appearing weak and tired. He remains in detention in an undisclosed location.

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The Law Society of Ontario is deeply troubled by Ezzat Ghonim's situation and urges Your Excellency to comply with Egypt's obligations under international human rights laws, including the United Nations' *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*.

Article 16 of the *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* states:

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; 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.

Article 17 states:

Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.

Article 18 states:

Lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions.

Furthermore, Article 23 provides:

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.

The Law Society urges the Government of Egypt to:

- a. disclose immediately the physical and psychological condition as well as the whereabouts of Ezzat Ghonim;
- b. guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Ezzat Ghonim;

- c. if he is in state custody, release Ezzat Ghonim immediately and unconditionally;
- d. carry out a thorough, impartial and effective investigation into the disappearance of Ezzat Ghonim and ensure those responsible are held to account;
- e. guarantee that adequate reparation will be provided to Ezzat Ghonim if he is found to be a victim of human rights abuses;
- f. put an end to all acts of harassment and acts of violence against lawyers in Egypt;
- g. ensure that all people in Egypt, including lawyers and judges, are able to exercise freely their freedom of association, peaceful assembly, opinion and expression, including when such expression is critical of government institutions and actions;
- h. ensure that all lawyers and judges in Egypt are adequately safeguarded by the authorities such that they are able to carry out their professional duties and activities free from intimidation, hindrance, harassment, improper interference, the threat of criminalization or other human rights violations; and
- i. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments.

Yours truly,

Paul B. Schabas
Treasurer

**The Law Society of Ontario is the governing body for more than 50,000 lawyers and 8,000 paralegals in the province of Ontario, Canada. The Treasurer is the head of the Law Society.*

The mandate of the Law Society is to govern the legal profession in the public interest by upholding the independence, integrity and honour of the legal profession for the purpose of advancing the cause of justice and the rule of law.

cc:

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