

June 16, 2015



The Law Society of
Upper Canada | Barreau
du Haut-Canada

His Excellency Abdel Fattah el-Sisi
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Abedine Palace
Cairo, Egypt

Office of the Treasurer

Osgoode Hall
130 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5H 2N6

Your Excellency:

tel 416-947-3415
fax 416-947-7609

Re: The ongoing harassment of human rights lawyer Azza Soliman

I write on behalf of The Law Society of Upper Canada* to voice our grave concern over the ongoing harassment of human rights lawyer Azza Soliman. When serious issues of apparent injustice to lawyers and the judiciary come to our attention, we speak out.

Azza Soliman is a human rights lawyer and founder of the Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance.

According to reports, on January 24, 2015, Azza Soliman witnessed the violent dispersal of a protest, which led to the death of a political activist. Azza Soliman was not participating in the protest, but she was coincidentally in the same area and witnessed the dispersal and the shooting of the activist.

On the same day, Azza Soliman voluntarily went to the Public Prosecutor's Office to give her testimony regarding the incident she had witnessed. Azza Soliman told the prosecutor that police were responsible for the death of the political activist. Reports indicate that after providing her testimony, she was interrogated by the prosecutor and advised that she was under investigation for charges relating to "unauthorized protests" and "breach of security and public order". Azza Soliman was released, pending investigation.

On March 23, 2015, Azza Soliman was informed that she had been formally charged with the abovementioned charges, along with 16 other witnesses to the January 24, 2015, incident.

In concern over these reports, The Law Society of Upper Canada urges Your Excellency to consider Articles 16 and 23 of the United Nations' *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*.

Article 16 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, economics or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Moreover, Article 23 states:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the rights 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. guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Azza Soliman;
- b. guarantee all the procedural rights that should be accorded to Azza Soliman and other human rights lawyers and defenders in Egypt;
- c. put an end to all acts of harassment against Azza Soliman as well as other human rights lawyers and defenders in Egypt;
- d. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments.

Yours very truly,

Janet E. Minor
Treasurer

**The Law Society of Upper Canada is the governing body for more than 47,000 lawyers and 7,000 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:

Mr. Ibrahim Mehleb
Prime Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Magles El Shaab Street, Kasr El Aini Street
Cairo, Egypt

Mr. Mahmoud Saber
Minister of Justice of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Ministry of Justice
Magles El Saeb Street, Wezaret Al Adl
Cairo, Egypt

Wael Aboul-Magd
Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt
454 Laurier Avenue East
Ottawa, ON, K1N 6R3

Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada

Mary Lawlor, Executive Director, Front Line Defenders

Vincent Forest, Head of European Union Office, Front Line Defenders

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch

Adrie van de Streek, Executive Director, Lawyers for Lawyers

David F. Sutherland, Chair, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

Yves Berthelot, President, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Gabriella Knaul, Special Rapporteur of the Human Council on the independence of judges and lawyers, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Sarah Smith, Human Rights and Rule of Law Policy Adviser, The Law Society of England and Wales