

Public Statement

The Law Society of Ontario expresses grave concern about the travel ban, frozen assets and criminal charges against lawyer Azza Soliman in Egypt

Toronto, ON — The Law Society of Ontario expresses grave concern over the travel ban, frozen assets, and criminal charges against 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 (CEWLA). We have previously intervened on behalf of Azza Soliman when she witnessed the death of a political activist, by the police, and subsequently faced charges relating to “unauthorized protests” and “breach of security and public order”. The details of that intervention are outlined in our letter to you dated June 16, 2015, and I have attached this letter for your ease of reference.

According to reports, Azza Soliman had recently intended to travel from Egypt to Jordan to participate in a training session for the Musawah movement, an organization promoting equity within the Muslim community. Azza Soliman was informed by authorities that she is banned from travelling. Her personal assets, and the assets belonging to her law firm are frozen, as she is now among a group of human rights defenders who are being prosecuted because they receive money from abroad for their work. Azza Soliman now faces charges for slandering Egypt's image by claiming that women in the country are at risk of rape. There is the potential that, if she is convicted of these charges, she would face a lengthy prison sentence

In addition Azza Soliman is constantly harassed and monitored by the government. Newspapers and television channels label her as 'enemy of the people'.

The Law Society of Ontario is deeply troubled by Azza Soliman's situation and urges the Egyptian Government 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, economics 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. withdraw the charges against Azza Soliman immediately and unconditionally;
- b. remove the travel ban restricting Azza Soliman's ability to travel immediately and unconditionally;
- c. immediately grant Azza Soliman full and unrestricted access to all of the assets and accounts that belong to her personally and to her law firm;
- d. guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Azza Soliman;
- e. put an end to all acts of harassment against lawyers in Egypt;
- f. 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
- g. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments.