

Australian journalist Peter Greste, once imprisoned with Alaa, to join Laila Soueif on hunger strike in London

On Monday (20th January), Laila Soueif, mother of wrongfully detained British-Egyptian citizen Alaa Abd el-Fattah, will be joined on her hunger strike and her daily visit to Downing Street, by the Australian journalist Peter Greste. Peter was imprisoned in Egypt for one year for his work with Al Jazeera English, and spent much of that year locked up with Alaa.

Announcing his decision to join Laila on hunger strike with an article in the Guardian, Peter Greste [wrote](#): "If anyone represents the very British values of respect for human rights, democracy, justice, due process and basic decency, it's Alaa. And if those values mean anything at all, the government will rescue him from his prison cell in Cairo. This has gone on far too long which is why I am joining the campaign to get my good friend out."

Peter will join Laila outside Downing Street every working day from 10am to 11am.

Today (Friday 17th January) is Day 110 of Laila Soueif's hunger strike in protest at her son Alaa's continued imprisonment beyond the end of his prison sentence. She has consumed nothing but herbal tea, black coffee and rehydration salts since September 29th 2024. She will once again visit Downing Street between 10am-11am today to 'wait for news' on Alaa.

David Lammy told Parliament at FCDO questions on Tuesday that securing Alaa's release is the government's "number one issue". He also confirmed to Parliament that the Prime Minister has written twice to President Sisi of Egypt about Alaa on the 26th December and 8th January and that National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell discussed Alaa with Egyptian authorities in Cairo on the 2nd January.

Responding to the Foreign Secretary calling Alaa's case the government's 'number one issue' Laila Soueif said:

"I am glad that the Foreign Secretary is saying that Alaa's freedom is now the 'number one issue' for the government. But sending letters to the Egyptian President is clearly not enough. We don't know if the Egyptian authorities have responded to Mr. Starmer's letters, or if they have ignored them. Unless there are diplomatic consequences for the Egyptians, these letters could simply be ignored until I am dead.

"The truth is that I don't have time for an exchange of letters. I could collapse or be hospitalised at any time. I need the Prime Minister to talk directly to President Sisi and secure Alaa's release. I desperately want to live to see my son a free man, reunited with his son in Brighton and I will not break my hunger strike until he is free.

"I of course understand that everyone's most urgent job right now should be to get as much aid as possible into Gaza. If I were not on hunger strike trying to get Alaa released I would be working on collecting aid for Gaza myself. I hope Mr. Starmer and Mr. Lammy will get Alaa released soon so I can do that, rather than hang around outside their offices waiting to die and cause a scandal."

There has been wide ranging support for the campaign to secure Alaa's release including from high profile celebrities ([Brian Cox](#), [Bill Nighy](#), [Emily Watson](#), [Harriet Walter](#), [Khalid Abdalla](#), [Joseph Fiennes](#)), [12 Nobel Laureates](#) (including JM Coetzee, Annie Ernaux, Kazuo Ishiguro and Olga Tokarczuk), a letter to David Lammy from [107 Parliamentarians](#) and a range of interventions in Parliament from senior MPs.

NOTES TO EDITORS

For media enquiries or requests for interviews with Laila Soueif or Alaa's family please email freedomforalaa@gmail.com or contact Huw Jordan on 07729888709.

HUNGER STRIKE

Laila Soueif's hunger strike is unprecedented. There is no historical data to refer to when trying to estimate how much longer she has before entering a critical condition, particularly given she is 68 years old.

Famous hunger strikers, such as Bobby Sands, who died after 66 days on hunger strike, did not take any rehydration salts - which enable the kidneys to function for much longer. Rehydration salts were introduced by Palestinian prisoners into their hunger strikes in the 2010s and there is no readily available medical data as to the timelines of their conditions.

DAVID LAMMY'S RECORD ON ALAA

- On July 4th 2022, then Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy wrote to then Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to call on her to press Egyptian authorities for Alaa's immediate release, and to meet Alaa's family:
<https://x.com/DavidLammy/status/1543874549342674944>
- On November 3rd 2022 David Lammy joined Alaa's sisters at a protest sit-in outside the Foreign Office and said 'It is an outrage the Foreign Office has not even been given consular access': <https://x.com/davidlammy/status/1588108604304896002>
- On November 6th 2022 he hosted Alaa's sister Mona Seif on his LBC show:
<https://x.com/DavidLammy/status/1589235381299736576>
- On November 8th 2022 in Parliament David Lammy called the government's diplomacy 'weak' and called for 'serious diplomatic consequences' for the Egyptian government if Alaa was not released:
<https://x.com/FreedomForAlaa/status/1589971659897057280/video/1>
- On November 9th 2022 on BBC Radio 4's Today programme David Lammy described the £4 billion trade partnership with Egypt as 'tremendous leverage':
<https://x.com/BBCr4today/status/1590262697320407040>
- On the same programme David Lammy called for the Egyptian ambassador to have his access to Whitehall revoked saying: "UK officials in Egypt have no consular access to this British national and you've got to ask why is it that the Egyptian ambassador has access to Whitehall in those circumstances... I think it should stop. I don't think the government should be announcing a strategic partnership this year when in fact this case is lingering and has gone on for months and months and months and UK officials have not had access to check on his welfare.":

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/09/britain-does-not-know-if-alaa-abd-el-fattah-still-alive-minister-admits>

- Keir Starmer also raised the case with the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in Parliament on the same day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWjRwBZ253I>
- On 6th October 2023 David Lammy set out plans for a special envoy for British citizens detained abroad and told families 'You are not forgotten': <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/labour-david-lammy-nazanin-hostages-special-envoy-b1111795.html>
- The Labour Party have since included a 'right to consular assistance' in their 2024 manifesto: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/sep/26/labour-vows-to-give-uk-citizens-abroad-legal-right-to-foreign-office-help> Alaa still does not have consular access.
- In 2023 the Foreign Affairs Committee published a report, following an inquiry, that was critical of the way that the FCDO handles complex detention cases of British nationals: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/6647/the-fcdos-approach-to-state-level-hostage-situations/publications/>

ACTIONS THE FOREIGN OFFICE COULD TAKE

1. Change the travel advice on the Foreign Office's website to reflect the reality of the moment: that if you are arrested in Egypt they cannot guarantee consular access. The US provides this [advice](#) to its citizens.
2. Convene a joint meeting of ministers and officials of the FCDO, Ministry of Defence and Department of Business and Trade to discuss a unified strategy towards Alaa's case.
3. Summon the Egyptian ambassador in London and restrict his access to Whitehall if Alaa is not released and returned to the UK. Officially downgrade the diplomatic relationship.
4. Announce a moratorium on any governmental assistance or promotion of new Foreign Direct Investments into Egypt. [As called for by 15 NGOs](#) in November.
5. Announce a moratorium on any new direct investments by companies owned by the Foreign Office, such as the scandalous green hydrogen plant above. British International Investments, which is owned by the Foreign Office, has 137 *direct* investments in Egypt - indexed here: <https://tinyurl.com/5n8z4v4c>.
6. Inform the Egyptian authorities that Britain will make a negative submission at Egypt's upcoming Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council.
7. Reach out to European allies as part of the Foreign Secretary's bridge-building. Alaa is also a priority figure for the EU, so coordinate with them. The EU has major leverage with Egypt now as part of an [enormous new aid package](#).
8. Reach out to American allies. Alaa has long been a priority figure for the State Department. Incoming Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, has tweeted his support of imprisoned [journalists](#) and [human rights defenders](#) in Egypt before. The USA has consistent and major leverage over Egypt as its second largest recipient of military equipment and other aid packages.

