

IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday 30th September

Laila Soueif, mother of British-Egyptian citizen Alaa Abd el-Fattah, starts hunger strike to protest his continued imprisonment

Laila Soueif, the mother of British-Egyptian citizen Alaa Abd el-Fattah, has started a hunger strike in Cairo, in protest at her son's continued imprisonment in Egypt after the end of his 5 year prison sentence. She does not plan to eat until he is released.

September 29th marked 5 years since Alaa Abd el-Fattah was arrested and detained in Egypt. Egypt sentenced Alaa to 5 years in prison, so based on Egypt's own criminal law, which includes pre-trial detention in prison sentences, Alaa should have been released yesterday.

Laila Soueif's daughters, and Alaa's sisters, Sanaa and Mona Seif, will meet the UK's Foreign Secretary David Lammy on Wednesday afternoon, to urge that he acts to secure Alaa's release from prison and return to the UK as a matter of priority.

Starting her hunger strike on the first day of Alaa's imprisonment beyond his prison sentence, Laila Soueif said:

"I will not eat again until Alaa is released. Every day that he is in prison beyond his sentence is a grave injustice, even beyond the terrible injustice that he has been imprisoned at all. Once again the Egyptian authorities have violated their own laws to persecute my son. At this stage I consider this a kidnapping as well as unlawful detention.

"Alaa is a British citizen, and it is urgent that the UK government intervene now to stop this new violation of his human rights. The Foreign Secretary David Lammy has spoken up for Alaa in the past, but he must now turn those words into action.

"My son had hope that the British government would secure his release. If they do not I fear he will spend his entire life in prison. So I am going on hunger strike for him, and I would rather die than allow Alaa to continue to be mistreated in this way."

Laila Soueif's hunger strike means she will not eat food and only drink water with salt to regulate her blood pressure. The 68 year old will record her vitals and publicly release them regularly to track the effect of the hunger strike on her health.

At a press conference in London on Thursday 26th September Alaa's sisters Sanaa and Mona criticised the UK government for the lack of progress on Alaa's case, and David Lammy's failure to meet with them. The Foreign Office subsequently arranged a meeting between the Foreign Secretary and Alaa's family on Wednesday (2nd October) this week. Former detainee Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe also attended the press conference and said: "Every single day post 29th September is almost a double injustice for Alaa."

As Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy showed extensive support for Alaa's campaign, including:

- Calling for the Egyptian ambassador to have his access to Whitehall revoked because of lack of consular access to Alaa.
- Referring to the 'tremendous leverage' of the '4 billion trading partnership with Egypt'
- Calling the previous government's diplomacy on the case 'weak' and calling for 'serious diplomatic consequences' for the Egyptian government if Alaa was not released

The Labour Party also included a 'right to consular assistance' in their 2024 manifesto. The government have still not secured consular access to Alaa. [more in Notes to Editors below]

The Egyptian authorities are refusing to release Alaa on the basis of two years he spent in pre-trial detention before his verdict. But according to Egyptian law those pre-trial detention years should be counted towards his prison sentence. In 2021 Alaa was found guilty of 'spreading false news' after he shared a Facebook post about torture in Egypt. Neither the prosecution or the defence presented their case to the judge before a verdict was found.

Successive UK Prime Ministers have failed to secure Alaa's release, or even consular access to him, despite continually raising his case at the highest levels of the Egyptian government. The UK government has not sanctioned Egypt diplomatically despite their failure to grant consular access. In 2022 Alaa went on hunger strike to the brink of death during COP27 in Egypt, which was only broken when he collapsed in his cell and was given an intravenous drip by the Egyptian authorities.

NOTES TO EDITORS

For media enquiries or requests for interviews with Sanaa or Mona Seif please email freedomforalaa@gmail.com (<mailto:freedomforalaa@gmail.com>).

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>
(<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>
(<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>
(<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>

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- 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>

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- 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-s-till-alive-minister-admits>

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- 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>

(<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-b-1111795.html>

(<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/labour-david-lammy-nazanin-hostages-special-envoy-b-1111795.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>

(<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/>

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ACTIONS THE FOREIGN OFFICE COULD TAKE

- 1 Place conditions on the \$400,000,000 Egypt is due to receive from the UK in direct aid in the coming two years. Further information here: <https://tinyurl.com/p9uvcejf> (<https://tinyurl.com/p9uvcejf>).
- 2 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.
- 3 Convene a joint meeting of members of the Ministries of Defence and Trade to discuss a unified strategy.
- 4 Summon the Egyptian ambassador in London and inform him Alaa must be on a plane to the UK the day his sentence finishes on September 29th or his access will be restricted.
- 5 Announce a moratorium on any governmental assistance or promotion of new Foreign Direct Investments into Egypt.
- 6 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> (<https://tinyurl.com/5n8z4v4c>)
- 7 Inform the Egyptian authorities that Britain will make a negative submission at Egypt's upcoming Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council.
- 8 Exert pressure through the IMF's loan negotiations with Egypt, where the UK has significant influence.
- 9 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.
- 10 Reach out to American allies. Alaa has long been a priority figure for the State Department. America has consistent and major leverage over Egypt as its second largest recipient of military equipment and other aid packages.