

**Alaa Abd el-Fattah – NGOs send letter to United Nations Working
Group on Arbitrary Detention**

12 November 2024

Dear Dr. Gillett, Dr. Yudkivska, Ms. Gopalan, Dr. Estrada-Castillo, and Dr. Malila,

We are writing, as a coalition of human rights organisations, regarding the urgent submission made to you, as members of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD), on behalf of **Alaa Abd el-Fattah**, the award-winning British-Egyptian writer and activist. Alaa Abd el-Fattah remains arbitrarily detained in Egypt and we strongly urge you to announce your opinion on his case at the earliest opportunity.

An international counsel team, led by barrister Can Yeğinsu, filed an urgent appeal with the UNWGAD on behalf of Mr. Abd el-Fattah and his family one year ago, on 14 November 2023, submitting that his continued detention is arbitrary and violates international law. Shortly afterwards, on 23 November 2023, 34 freedom of expression and human rights organisations sent a letter to the UNWGAD supporting that submission and urging the UNWGAD promptly to issue its opinion on this matter. On 17 April 2024, 27 freedom of expression and human rights organisations sent a follow up

letter to the UNWGAD, enquiring whether there was any update in respect of this urgent appeal.

Alaa Abd el-Fattah's case remains of significant concern to our organisations. He has spent much of the past decade imprisoned in Egypt due to charges related to his writing and activism. He was most recently arrested in September 2019 and was sentenced in December 2021 to five years' imprisonment, having already spent two years in pre-trial detention. Despite completing his unjust and arbitrary five-year sentence on 29 September 2024, the Egyptian authorities have refused to release him, ignoring the time he spent in pre-trial detention. This defies international legal norms and contradicts Egyptian law. Alaa Abd el-Fattah is currently being held at Wadi al-Natrun prison near Cairo and continues to be denied consular visits, despite his British citizenship. His mother, Laila Soueif, has been on hunger strike since 29 September 2024 in protest against her son's unjust and prolonged detention.

In November 2022, [UN Experts](#) joined the increasing number of human rights voices demanding Alaa Abd el-Fattah's immediate release. Yet two years later, having fully served his five-year sentence, he remains in prison.

Despite his ongoing incarceration, Alaa Abd el-Fattah's writing and activism continue to be recognised worldwide: most recently, in October 2024, he was [announced](#) as the joint winner of the 2024 PEN Pinter Prize with Arundhati Roy, and recognised as the 2024 Writer of Courage, eliciting the following encomium from Naomi Klein at the ceremony:

Alaa Abd El-Fattah embodies the relentless courage and intellectual depth that Arundhati Roy herself so powerfully represents, making her selection of him as the Writer of Courage profoundly fitting. Despite enduring a series of unjust sentences that robbed him of over a decade of freedom, his liberation continues to be denied. This prize, shared between two vital voices, reminds us of the urgent need to continue to raise our own in a call to 'Free Alaa' at long last.

Our organisations continue to call for Alaa Abd el-Fattah's immediate and unconditional release and we request that the UNWGAD urgently announce its opinion on his case.

Yours sincerely,

Alejandro Mayoral Baños, Executive Director, **Access Now**

Ahmed Samih Farag, General Director, **Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies**

Quinn McKew, Executive Director, **ARTICLE 19**

Neil Hicks, Senior Director for Advocacy, **Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)**

Gypsy Guillén Kaiser, Advocacy and Communications Director, **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)**

Chris Doyle, Director, **Council for Arab-British Understanding (CAABU)**

Jillian C. York, Director for International Freedom of Expression, **Electronic Frontier Foundation**

Ahmed Attalla, Executive Director, **Egyptian Front for Human Rights**

Samar Elhussieny, Programs Officer, **Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)**

Daniel Gorman, Director, **English PEN**

Rasmus Alenius Boserup, Executive Director, **EuroMed Rights**

James Lynch, Co-Director, **FairSquare**

Khalid Ibrahim, Executive Director, **Gulf Centre for Human Rights**

Mostafa Fouad, Head of Programs, **HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement**

Matt Redding, Head of Advocacy, **IFEX**

Baroness Helena Kennedy LT KC, Director, **International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)**

Alice Mogwe, President, **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders**

Liesl Gertholtz, Managing Director, PEN/Barbey Freedom To Write Center, **PEN America**

Mark Allen Klenk, Writers at Risk Committee Chair, **PEN Austria**

Grace Westcott, President, **PEN Canada**

Romana Cacchioli, Executive Director, **PEN International**

Rupert Skilbeck, Director, **REDRESS**

Antoine Bernard, Director of Advocacy and Assistance, **Reporters Sans Frontières**

Ricky Monahan Brown, President, **Scottish PEN**

Ahmed Salem, Executive Director, **Sinai Foundation for Human Rights (SFHR)**

Menna Elfyn, President, **Wales PEN Cymru**

Gerald Staberock, Secretary General, **World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)**,
within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders