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To all MEPs signatory to the letter on the situation of Egyptian human rights defenders

Dear Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for your letter of 2 December 2020 about the situation of Egyptian human rights defenders and notably the cases of Patrick George Zaki and Giulio Regeni.

As we follow and address the human rights developments in Egypt, arrests and the prosecution of civil society organisations and people defending human rights, remain a cause for concern. The recent arrests of the director and staff members of Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) underlined once more the worrying situation in this regard.

We consider EIPR to provide a critical service to the Egyptian people. We expressed our concern in a Statement of the Spokesperson of the European External Action Service on 21 November¹. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Mr Eamon Gilmore, reiterated our concern in follow up contacts with Cairo. While the release of the three EIPR staff members on 3 December is a positive step, we call for the release of Mr Patrick George Zaki, an EIPR researcher, who remains in detention since February 2020. Commissioner Dalli expressed this most recently in a speech delivered at the European Parliament on 17 December 2020 on my behalf².

We have been following closely the case of Mr Zaki and have raised it continuously with the Egyptian authorities as well as under item 4 at the 45th United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva in September. His case has also been selected for trial monitoring and, as a result, the EU Delegation as well as EU Member States embassy officials in Cairo already attended several hearings on the pre-trial detention of Mr Zaki.

Further, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights has reached out to the Egyptian authorities to call for the release of prisoners on humanitarian grounds amid the COVID-19 pandemic as well as improving the conditions for those that remain in prison, with particular concern for those in pre-trial detention and for human rights defenders. In light of Mr Zaki's medical condition, the EU Special Representative explicitly called for his release on humanitarian grounds due to risk of infection with COVID-19.

¹ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89101/egypt-statement-spokesperson-recent-arrests-human-rights-activists_en

² https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90775/egypt-speech-behalf-hrvp-borrell-ep-plenary-deteriorating-situation-human-rights-egypt_en

We also continue to follow closely the case of Giulio Regeni. We have raised it in our bilateral meetings and contacts, asking the Egyptian authorities to fully cooperate with the Italian authorities in order to clarify the circumstances of the death of Mr Regeni. This case matters for the entire European Union, not just for one Member State, and was also raised as such under Item 4 at the 45th Human Rights Council in Geneva in September. As we said from the very beginning, the European Union stands at the side of the Regeni family to help find the truth.

The EU Statement delivered at the 45th United Nations Human Rights Council further raised various human rights issues in Egypt in general, including a call to release human rights defenders. Our concern also applies to executions, notably the recent rising numbers noted in Egypt in October. We communicate unequivocally our opposition to the use of capital punishment in all cases and under all circumstances, and we have consistently called for its universal abolition.

Our commitments have a central place in the framework of our political engagement and cooperation with Egypt. Hence, human rights matters were also discussed during my visit to Cairo on 3 September 2020³.

The EU has a clear interest in Egypt's long-term stability and security. This can only be achieved if human rights are fully implemented and upheld. This remains the guiding thought in our bilateral dialogue with Egypt within the framework of our partnership.

You can count on our continued engagement on this matter.

Yours faithfully,



Josep Borrell Fontelles

³ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/egypt/84724/egypt-remarks-high-representative-vice-president-josep-borrell-press-conference-foreign_en