



## [Rights Groups Justifiably Criticize the Jailing of Prominent Egyptian Activist Alaa Abdel Fattah](#)

This week, Egyptian officials have elicited condemnation from rights groups for sentencing prominent activist Alaa Abdel Fattah to five years in prison on dubious and politically-motivated charges. The unjust convictions against Abdel Fattah and several other well-known advocates, who had already been detained for multiple years, are just the latest in a longstanding pattern of repressive behavior and human rights violations by the el-Sisi regime. Under the current government, reputable international rights organizations have detailed how tens of thousands of Egyptian citizens have been arbitrarily imprisoned in a massive crackdown aimed at stifling dissent, suffocating political activism, and restricting civil liberties and freedoms. Amnesty International labeled the recent verdict as a “travesty of justice,” while Human Rights Watch highlighted that the trial of Abdel Fattah and others had been hindered by numerous due and fair process violations. Ultimately, critics point to how the problematic charges against political prisoners in Egypt are used to try and protect the existing military dictatorship and power structure controlling the country.

Alaa Abdel Fattah was one of the leaders of the 2011 Arab Spring movement in Egypt. Those pro-democracy protests led to the end of Hosni Mubarak’s 30-year reign of power in the nation. Abdel Fattah has been imprisoned since September of 2019, with frequent reports emerging of mistreatment and torture, which have become commonplace under the el-Sisi regime. During the course of his detainment, he has been denied movement outside of his prison cell as well as access to books, radio, or a watch to tell time. Abdel Fattah’s sister, Sanaa Seif, has also been sentenced to a year-and-a-half in prison for merely calling on the government to alleviate congestion in the country’s prisons – a phenomenon that has especially worsened in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Abdel Fattah’s lawyer was detained for retweeting a report and attempting to bring attention to the egregious death of a prisoner who was being held in the same facility as his client.

Human rights lawyers, activists, and opposition politicians, such as former members of parliament and presidential candidates, have been imprisoned for years in Egypt’s ‘pretrial detention’ apparatus since the military coup which brought el-Sisi to power in 2013. One such notable case is that of Ezzat Ghoneim, a human rights lawyer and head of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, who has been missing since March of 2018, according to Human Rights Watch. This blatant and consistent pattern of human suppression, imprisonment, forced disappearance, torture, and violations of civic rights have been defining characteristics of el-Sisi and his ruling regime. Rights activists have outlined how this behavior has been a major shackle on the prospects for civil society advancement and progress in Egypt over the preceding decade.

Despite the pressure that the United States and Europe have exerted on the current Egyptian government to improve its record on human rights, experts and analysts have grown more concerned with the continuous human rights abuses that they have engaged in – with some of them arguing that they rival or even exceed those under the repressive regime of former dictator Hosni Mubarak. It is unclear if the condemnation expressed by the U.S. State Department for these latest instances of human rights violations will have any ultimate effect on the reconfiguration of military aid. The United States supplies approximately \$1.3 billion worth of military aid to Egypt annually, of which only \$300 million is subject to human rights benchmarks.