



Jailed Egyptian Pro-Democracy Activist Alaa Abd El-Fattah Obtains British Citizenship in Hopes of Securing His Release from Prison

Alaa Abd El-Fattah, a leading pro-democracy activist in Egypt, has secured a British passport in an effort to put pressure on the Egyptian government to release him. Abd El-Fattah has been imprisoned on trumped-up charges such as “spreading false news undermining national security” and “using social media to commit a publishing offense.” Multiple reputable rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have denounced the charges and his conviction, outlining that the trial had multiple fair and due process violations. Abd El-Fattah was sentenced to a five-year prison term back in December 2021, and still has an upcoming trial for the other spurious charges. It is the hope of Abd El-Fattah and rights advocates that this latest development will place more pressure on the El-Sisi government to free him as a British citizen since in recent years, several Egyptian political prisoners who hold foreign passports have been released. Abd El-Fattah is being held in the Tora prison complex, where he has detailed suffering torture and abuse at the hands of the guards. He was also denied the right to an attorney during his pre-trial detention, and is currently on a hunger strike.

Abd El-Fattah first gained prominence during the democratic uprisings that took place as a part of the 2011 Arab Spring. He was a well-known voice in the movement to topple the regime of former dictator Hosni Mubarak, and comes from a family of activists – with his father being a human rights lawyer and his two sisters serving as political activists as well. Alaa was first convicted back in 2014 for his role in an “unauthorized” protest. He was then released in 2019 after serving a five-year sentence before being re-arrested the same year and spending a further 2 years in detention leading up to his most recent trial. The latest 2 years were not deducted from his current sentence, and he was tried in the Egyptian Emergency State Court, which was established in the 1950s under Egypt’s Emergency Law and whose verdicts are not subject to appeals by higher courts. The final verdict also needs to be approved by the president or someone designated by him, destroying any sense of judicial independence. These courts have been used thousands of times, almost exclusively in cases involving dissidents and political opponents. Alaa Abd El-Fattah is not the only human rights activist to be sentenced recently, as lawyer Mohamed al-Baquer and blogger Mohamed “Oxygen” Ibrahim have been imprisoned on lengthy sentences as well.

The Egyptian government under El-Sisi has been scrutinized for its track record of human rights violations and abuses. The regime continues to use heavy-handed tactics to arrest anyone protesting against the government. Many human rights activists have been harassed, tortured, arbitrarily arrested, forcibly disappeared, and even killed by security forces. It is not uncommon for police to abuse and torture suspects in Egypt. In 2016, Giulio Regneri, an Italian doctoral student, was found dead on the side of a road after being brutalized.

Despite increasing concerns regarding human rights violations, the United States continues to supply Egypt with weapons, military supplies, and surveillance equipment. Thus, there is a growing sentiment among rights activists that this should be curtailed because of the fact that it enables the El-Sisi government to oppress its citizens.