

Prime Minister Keir Starmer
Government of the United Kingdom
London, UK

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni
Government of Italy
Rome, Italy

1 June 2025

Dear Prime Minister Keir Starmer,
Dear Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni,

We are writing with urgency on behalf of the Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SESAMO) to implore the UK and Italy's Prime Minister's Offices to press the Egyptian government for the immediate and unconditional release of British national Alaa Abd El-Fattah.

Established in 1991, SeSaMO is a leading Italian organisation devoted to the study of the Middle East in several disciplines and time periods. As part of our commitment to upholding academic freedom and freedom of expression both within the region and in relation to its study in Italy and worldwide, we feel compelled to raise this matter. We have been actively engaged in this issue for years and have already addressed the Italian Government on this matter.

Alaa Abd El-Fattah, a well-known advocate for human rights and democracy, has been imprisoned since 2019. After spending two years in pre-trial detention, he was sentenced to five years for charges that effectively criminalize his exercise of free speech. Although he was scheduled for release on September 29, 2024, after completing his full sentence, the Egyptian authorities have refused to count his pre-trial detention toward his sentence, in direct violation of Egyptian law. On May 29, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention deemed his continued imprisonment unlawful and called for his immediate release. Alaa -British and Egyptian citizen- has suffered multiple legal and human rights violations during his detention, including being denied access to British consular support. In October 2024, the UK government indicated that "Mr El-Fattah's case remains a priority." Yet, seven



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months later, he remains incarcerated, while the UK and Italy maintain friendly diplomatic ties with Egypt.

With Alaa's mother, Professor Laila Soueif, now critically ill and her death imminent due to hunger strike, immediate and decisive action is required from the UK Prime Minister's Office. The UK and Italy must make it unmistakably clear that ongoing diplomatic relations with Egypt will suffer serious consequences unless this unlawful detention ends.

Italy and the UK, like all European governments, present themselves as bearers and defenders of human rights, rule of law, and democracy. Like so many others unjustly detained in Egypt, Alaa's case is precisely about defending human rights, democracy and justice. Professor Soueif's hunger strike is a call to wake consciences both in Egypt and in Europe. Her sacrifice, like Alaa's continued imprisonment, are a blight on the conscience of European governments. We call on you, as European leaders, to show that you live up to the values you proclaim and that we – scholars and peoples – hold dear.

Every hour that Alaa remains imprisoned brings Professor Soueif closer to death. The Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and Italy must act without delay to bring this dire situation to an end.

Sincerely,

Rosita Di Peri and Maria Chiara Rioli on behalf of the Board and the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Italian Society for Middle East Studies