

Joint statement

Egypt: Rights Groups Call for the Immediate Release of Photojournalist Hamdi El-Zaeem Ahead of His Trial Hearing, After Ten Years of Deprivation of Liberty

25 September 2026

The undersigned organizations call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately release photojournalist Hamdi Mokhtar Ali, known as "[Hamdi El-Zaeem](#)," and bring to an end his decade-long ordeal of detention, restrictive measures, and ongoing criminal proceedings, ahead of his trial hearing scheduled for 27 September 2026.

On 26 September 2026, Hamdi El-Zaeem will mark ten full years of deprivation of liberty in various forms, including pretrial detention, precautionary measures, and ongoing judicial proceedings. Throughout this decade, no final conviction has been issued against him. Meanwhile, his professional and personal life have been profoundly disrupted, and his family has borne the heavy burden of years of detention and legal restrictions.

El-Zaeem was first arrested in September 2016 outside the Journalists Syndicate and remained in pretrial detention in Case No. 15060 of 2016 (Qasr El-Nil Misdemeanor Case). In June 2018, the court ordered his release under precautionary measures, which he fully complied with by regularly reporting to police and judicial authorities as required.

Despite his full compliance with these measures, El-Zaeem was [arrested](#) again on 4 January 2021 after leaving a police station. He was denied contact with his family and lawyer for 12 days before appearing before the Supreme State Security Prosecution on 16 January 2021 in connection with Case No. 955 of 2020, where he faced charges including joining a terrorist group and participating in a criminal agreement aimed at committing a terrorist offense.

Since then, [El-Zaeem](#) has remained in pretrial detention for years, far exceeding the two-year maximum period permitted under Egyptian law. In January 2025, he was referred to trial alongside dozens of other defendants in the same case, following years of detention pending trial.

The continued deprivation of Hamdi El-Zaeem's liberty over such an extended period constitutes a serious violation of the right to liberty and security of person, as well as the fundamental guarantees of a fair trial. Under the law, pretrial detention is intended to be an exceptional and

temporary measure, not a form of punishment imposed for years before a court has ruled on the charges.

The seriousness of El-Zaeem's situation is further compounded by his health conditions. He suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure, and a herniated disc, in addition to the physical and psychological consequences of prolonged detention. He is also the father of four children and the primary breadwinner for his family, which has endured the consequences of his absence and the restrictions imposed on his liberty for an entire decade.

Hamdi El-Zaeem's case cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader state of press freedom and freedom of expression in Egypt. Journalists and media professionals continue to face arbitrary arrest, prolonged pretrial detention, and criminal prosecution because of their professional work or their peaceful exercise of freedom of expression. Restrictions on access to information, including the blocking of hundreds of websites, have further undermined media pluralism and weakened the ability of independent media outlets to inform the public and facilitate debate on issues of public interest.

In this context, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [ranked](#) Egypt 169th out of 180 countries in the 2026 World Press Freedom Index, noting that the country remains one of the most hostile environments for journalists and that media pluralism continues to face severe restrictions. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) also identified [Egypt](#) among the world's ten worst jailers of journalists in its 2025 prison census. Hamdi El-Zaeem's case, together with those of other journalists who remain detained or subject to prosecution, illustrates the continued reliance on pretrial detention and criminal proceedings to target media professionals. At least 20 journalists remain behind bars, while several have exceeded the maximum legal period for pretrial detention.

Hamdi El-Zaeem's case, alongside those of other journalists who remain detained or subject to prosecution, highlights the continued use of pretrial detention and criminal proceedings against media professionals. At least 20 journalists remain behind bars, while several have exceeded the legal limits for pretrial detention.

After ten full years of deprivation of liberty without a final conviction, the undersigned organizations stress that there is no longer any legal or humanitarian justification for Hamdi El-Zaeem's continued detention or the prolongation of his trial. Measures that were intended to be temporary and exceptional have become a prolonged punishment that has consumed an entire decade of his life, career, and family life, causing profound harm that cannot easily be remedied.

The organizations believe that keeping him detained after all these years amounts to an ongoing injustice and a clear failure to uphold the principles of justice and the rule of law. It has transformed pretrial detention and related precautionary measures from exceptional legal tools into a de facto long-term punishment. It is time to bring this prolonged suffering to an end and secure his immediate release.

The undersigned organizations also call on the Egyptian authorities to take meaningful steps toward ending restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of expression, and to release journalists detained because of their journalistic work or their peaceful exercise of fundamental rights, in line with Egypt's Constitution and its international human rights obligations.

Signatory Organizations

1. Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
2. El Nadeem Center
3. Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)
4. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
5. Committee for Justice (CFJ)
6. Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF)
7. Save Freedom of Opinion Campaign
8. Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
9. Refugees Platform in Egypt (RPE)
10. Gohoud to Support Human Rights Defenders
11. REDWORD for Human Rights & Freedom of Expression
12. Tbian for Rights and Freedoms
13. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
14. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
15. Sinai Foundation for Human Rights (SFHR)
16. Egypt Wide for Human Rights