

# URGENT ACTION

## HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER MUST BE RELEASED

Yemeni asylum seeker, Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo, who has been arbitrary detained in Egypt for over 20 months, is at risk of deportation to Yemen, where his life would be at risk. Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo and his family were forced to flee Yemen for Egypt in 2014 after being subjected to violent attacks with impunity following his announcement of his conversion to Christianity on social media. Egyptian security forces arrested him on 15 December 2021 and forcibly disappeared him for two weeks, before bringing him for interrogations before a prosecutor, who ordered his pretrial detention pending investigations on bogus charges of "joining a terrorist group" and "defamation of the Islamic religion". He is held solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression, conscience and belief and must be immediately released; any plans to deport him must be halted.

### TAKE ACTION:

1. Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.

[Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Urgent Action 87.23**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

#### Minister of Interior Mahmoud Tawfiq

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#### Ambassador Motaz Zahran

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Dear Minister,

I write to express my concern about the arbitrary detention of Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo, a 54-year-old Yemeni asylum seeker held in Al-Qanater 1 prison, north of Cairo, and at risk of deportation. Security forces arrested Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo from his home on 21 December 2021, and forcibly disappeared him for two weeks, during which time the authorities refused to provide his family with any information about his fate and whereabouts. He was subsequently brought in front of the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), where a prosecutor ordered his pre-trial detention pending investigations on charges of "joining a terrorist group with knowledge of its purposes" and "defamation of the Islamic religion". These charges are in connection to his conversion to Christianity, about which he regularly posted on his social media platforms since fleeing from Yemen to Egypt in 2014. Since his arrest in December 2021, his pretrial detention has been extended without providing him with an opportunity to meaningfully challenge the lawfulness of his detention.

In July 2022, the Egyptian authorities issued a deportation order for Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo. If forcibly returned to Yemen, he would be at risk of arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and death including through the imposition of the death penalty or killing by armed groups or non-state agents. According to [Article 259](#) of the Yemeni Republican Decree for Law No. 12 for 1994, Concerning Crimes and Penalties, "Anyone who turns back from or denounces the religion of Islam, is punished by the death penalty after being questioned for repentance three times and after giving him a respite of thirty days. Apostasy in public by speech or acts is considered contradictory to the principles of Islam and its pillars in intention and determination. If the intention or determination is not established and the guilty shows repentance, there will be no punishment". Given these provisions, and previous threats faced while in Yemen, Amnesty International's assessment is that his life would be at risk should he be deported to Yemen.

I urge you to immediately release Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo as his detention is linked solely to the exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, conscience and belief, and to halt any plans to deport him to Yemen, where he would be at real risk of persecution. Pending his release, he should be held in conditions meeting international standards for the treatment of prisoners, and granted immediate access to his family, lawyers and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY**  
**INTERNATIONAL**



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo fled Yemen in August 2014 for Egypt, where he registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). After he announced his conversion to Christianity on his social media platforms in 2013, he and his family who lived in a rural area outside Taiz, were subjected to a wave of violent attacks. Members of his family told Amnesty International that he was fired from his job, his car was damaged, and that in June 2014, his home was set on fire and his wife passed away as a result of this attack. In August 2014 he fled Yemen to Egypt with his four children.

On 23 June 2022, Egyptian human rights group, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), [warned](#) of Abul- Baqi Saeed Abdo's imminent deportation and called on the Egyptian authorities to stop his forced return and drop the charges against him. On 30 June 2022, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief sent a [letter](#) to the Egyptian [authorities](#) highlighting the arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and unjust prosecution of Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo.

Religious minorities living in Egypt, including Christians, face entrenched discrimination in law and practice. The authorities have failed to protect [Christians](#) from repeated sectarian attacks and violence by armed groups targeting their communities since 2013 and to bring those responsible to justice in fair trials. Authorities also failed to protect Christians from attacks by armed groups in [North Sinai](#) or secure the safe return of hundreds of Christians who were forcibly displaced from North Sinai following violent attacks in 2017 or provide them with any compensation for lost property and livelihoods. Members of religious minorities and Muslims not espousing state-sanctioned religious beliefs have been subjected to arbitrary detention, prosecution and unjust imprisonment for "defamation of religion" and other bogus charges, while others are targeted simply for practicing their faith or defending the rights of religious minorities.

Egypt is party to both the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Refugee Convention; both require Egypt to provide international protection to refugees and to respect the principle of non-refoulement. According to a 1954 Memorandum of Understanding between Egypt and UNHCR, registration and refugee status determination in the country is delegated to UNHCR, while the Egyptian authorities are obliged to allow asylum seekers to meet with UNHCR representatives and to respect UNHCR's assessments of their refugee status. Egyptian media reported on June 2023 that the [authorities](#) are seeking to expedite the adoption of a new asylum law. While the draft law has yet to be made public, reports indicate that under the proposal, all asylum seekers and refugees in the country would be required to register with the authorities and regularize their status within six months of the law's executive regulations coming into force.

Egypt has an obligation not to return individuals to a situation where they would be at risk of persecution, torture or other serious human rights violations, including arbitrary deprivation of life. The principle of non-refoulement is recognized as a norm of customary international law and is enshrined in international instruments, including the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which Egypt is a state party.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Arabic, English.

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 2 November 2023**

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PRONOUN: Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo** (he/his)