

*Brussels, 25th February 2020*

**Mr Eamon Gilmore**  
**EU Special Representative for Human Rights**

Dear EU Special Representative for Human Rights,

I am writing to you to express my concern about the unfair detention of the Erasmus Mundus student Patrick George Zaki in Egypt.

Patrick Zaki is an Egyptian citizen and human rights activist who is taking part of the GEMMA Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree. He is specialising in Women's and Gender Studies, at the Universities of Granada and Bologna, thanks to an Erasmus Mundus excellence scholarship. On 7th February 2020, he was arbitrary arrested by airport immigration officers upon his arrival at Cairo International Airport, where he was traveling to visit his family in Mansoura, his hometown. **Patrick Zaki is a researcher unfairly detained for his political opinions and his human rights endeavor.**

According to different sources, following his detention **Patrick Zaki was interrogated and tortured by National Security Agency officers** before he appeared in front of the prosecutor on 8th February 2020. From that moment on, Mr Zaki has experienced how his **detention was progressively extended and renewed. Sometimes even without him or his attorneys' presence, using** the excuse of COVID-19 **social distancing** measures. On 23th May, his lawyers should have known the date of the next hearing, but the date was again postponed. This is not the first time that **Egyptian authorities use perverse techniques to criminalise dissent.** The tragic death of the young filmmaker, Shady Habash in Tora Prison, is another **worrying example of an innocent person waiting for a fair trial that never happened.**

The temporary release of some prisoners in different countries, in the context of COVID19, proves how governments are well aware of the impact that an uncontrollable outbreak could have in prisons. This fact **clearly shows that the lives of those who were accused blamelessly are in serious danger in serious danger, as it is the case of Patrick Zaki** who, also, suffers from asthma. COVID-19, as repeatedly raised by the international community, cannot be an excuse for increased repression, torture or violations of fundamental rights such as effective judicial protection.

**The European Parliament has expressed several times its concerns on the situation of human rights in Egypt,** particularly of those arbitrarily detained. In this regard, EP President David Sassoli called - back in February- for the immediate release of Patrick Zaki, and he stated how High Representative Josep Borrell assured that he would raise the case within the Foreign Affairs Council. In parallel, HR/VP Josep Borrell also pointed how the EU delegation and EU Member States' embassies in Cairo are attending hearings on Mr Zaki's pre-trial detention. In the latest Universal Periodic Review of United Nations, many countries urged Egypt to comply with Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Egypt has obligations under several international treaties to uphold these rights. However, small progress has been made.

Dear Special Representative, **Erasmus Programme has been regarded as one of the most successful initiatives to promote EU core values:** respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and rule of law. Different international students attend courses at European universities each year under Erasmus+ programme, making our universities more diverse and vibrant. **The detention of Patrick Zaki during the course of his fellowship represents a threat to these values and the EU's failure to act on this case would entail an undesirable precedent.**

We therefore urge you to make use of foreign policy instruments available to call for the immediate and unconditional release of the Erasmus student Patrick George Zaki.

Sincerely yours,

Soraya Rodriguez Ramos

Renew Europe Coordinator for Human Rights