



# PRESS RELEASE

## 30 October 2024

# Ashraf Omar: One hundred days a prisoner



*Gianluca Costantini (Italy)*

Cairo, October 30th : Egyptian activist, cartoonist, and translator Ashraf Omar is spending his one-hundredth day in pre-trial detention, following the seventh consecutive extension to his period in custody since he was first [arrested](#) at his home on July 22nd. In the hours immediately after his arrest his whereabouts were unknown until he appeared in front of the Supreme State Security Prosecution two days later.

A contributor to the [Al-Manassa](#) independent news platform, Mr Omar stands [accused](#) of “joining a terrorist group while being aware of its purposes, disseminating and publishing rumours and false news and information, and abuse of social media”, with no presentation of evidence forthcoming. During a six-hour interrogation by the Supreme State Security Prosecution, he was asked whether his cartoons were intended to incite the public. In the days prior to his arrest Mr Omar’s cartoons had focused on the debt crises and electrical blackouts in Egypt.

It is further [alleged](#) that police beat Mr Omar at the time of his arrest and threatened him with electrocution. Contact with his friends and family has been limited, with a brief half-hour visit from his [wife](#) permitted once every month. He is held at the 10th of Ramadan Prison’s sixth facility. His period of pre-trial detention has been extended every fifteen days via video conference, in his absence and with no consultation between defence lawyer and client.

According to [Human Rights Watch](#), such hearings were introduced by decree and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, however their continued use “exacerbates longstanding abusive pretrial detention practices and flagrant due process violations, and effectively contributes to covering up abusive detention conditions.”

Sarah Leah Whitson, Executive Director of [DAWN](#) (the NGO established by the late Jamal Khashoggi) said: “Egypt’s continued imprisonment of Ashraf Omar merely because some thin-skinned regime official was offended by his cartoons about the country’s miserable economic conditions says all you need to know about freedom of expression in Egypt. Egyptian officials are relying on their dirty bag of tricks, like endlessly renewing his pre-trial detention, to shut down artists and writers in the country.”

Ashraf Omar is no different from any other editorial cartoonist, exercising his fundamental human right to freedom of expression and, as a member of the press, making criticisms of government in a form that is inherently non-violent and wholly legitimate. In their response to that criticism, the Egyptian authorities overstep their bounds when they harm Mr Omar's person and neglect their obligation to protect his human rights.

In bracketing Ashraf Omar's work with terrorism, physically mistreating him, and ignoring due process in an effort to silence him, Egypt's Supreme State Security Prosecution sends a chilling message to every cartoonist in the country, and indeed any outspoken critic of the state.

**The undersigned organisations call for an end to the needlessly cruel and protracted detention of Ashraf Omar, the dismissal of the baseless criminal charges against him, and for his immediate release and safe return to family and friends.**

Association of Canadian Cartoonists / Association des caricaturistes canadiens (ACC)

Australian Cartoonists Association

Cartooning for Peace

Cartoonists Association of Nigeria (CARTAN)

Cartoonists Rights

European Cartoon Award

Federation of Cartoonists Organisations (FECO)

Forum for Humor and the Law (FORHUM)

Freedom Cartoonists Foundation

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## **CARTOONISTS RIGHTS**

Cartoonists Rights was founded by Dr Robert Russell in 1999 as a nonprofit organization to protect the rights of editorial cartoonists under threat. The organization was the first global organization whose core purpose is the protection of cartoonists rights in the pursuit of freedom of expression without fear.

## **CARTOONING FOR PEACE**

The Cartooning for Peace organisation was created in 2006 at the initiative of Kofi Annan, Nobel Peace Prize and former General Secretary of the United Nations, and press cartoonist Plantu. Now chaired by French press cartoonist Kak, Cartooning for Peace is an international network of cartoonists committed to the promotion of freedom of expression, Human Rights and mutual respect among people upholding different cultures and beliefs, using the universal language of press cartoons.

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