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Egypt: Human rights defenders at Daaarb newspaper and their families intimidated and detained

On 10 October 2020, human rights defender and journalist at Daaarb newspaper **Khaled Elbalshy** was informed that his brother, Kamal Elbalshy, had been placed under preventive detention. According to a board member of Egypt's Press Syndicate, a senior member of the Egyptian Government has claimed that there is no evidence against Kamal Elbalshy, and he is being targeted because he is the brother of the prominent human rights defender. These events follow the arrest of **Islam El-Kalhy** on 9 September 2020, also a journalist at Daaarb newspaper, who was detained while covering a peaceful protest in Giza.

[Khaled Elbalshy](#) is a human rights defender and prominent journalist. He is the chief editor of the Daaarb online newspaper, which works on documenting human rights violations, and following human rights defenders work in Egypt. He is a former board member of Egypt's Press Syndicate, as head of its Freedoms' Committee and was the chief editor of the private Al Badaiah online newspaper, which has been discontinued. [Islam El Kalhy](#) is human rights defender and journalist at Daaarb newspaper where he monitors human rights violations in Egypt. At the time of his arrest, he was covering peaceful demonstrations taking place in Munib, south Giza following the killing of a man at the hands of police.

On 20 September 2020, Khaled Elbalshy's brother, Kamal Elbalshy, was arrested while walking in the streets of Cairo near his home, and was forcibly disappeared for 10 days. On 1 October 2020, he was spotted at the Office of the Public Prosecutor. He is accused of "joining an illegal organisation", "misuse of social media" and "spreading false information" as part of the recently opened case 880, which is related to peaceful demonstrations that took place in September 2020. On 10 October 2020, Khaled Elbalshy was informed that his brother Kamal Elbalshy had been placed under preventive detention. Kamal Elbalshy has not been allowed to contact his lawyer since his detention. The next detention renewal session is scheduled to be held on 20 October 2020.

Khaled Elbalshy believes that the detention of his brother aims to intimidate and pressure him to cease his work. According to a board member of Egypt's Press Syndicate, a senior member of the Egyptian Government expressed in a private phone conversation that there is no evidence against Kamal Elbalshy but he will remain in detention because he is related to human rights defender Khaled Elbalshy. Khaled Elbalshy has been frequently harassed and intimidated for his peaceful and legitimate work documenting human rights violations in Egypt. Since 2017, authorities have blocked several online newspapers that Khaled Elbalshy had helped establish including 'Al-Bedaiah' and 'Kateb'. They have also made attempts to block Daaarb from being accessed domestically. In 2019, Khaled Elbalshy was the subject of [judicial harassment and a smear campaign](#) in which he was accused of spreading false rumors, and inciting violence against the state. The arrest of his brother Kamal Elbalshy is considered an attempt to further discourage him from carrying out his human rights work.

Kamal Elbalshy's arrest follows another recent incident involving the targeting of Daaarb staff. On 9 September 2020, Islam El-Kalhy was detained while he was covering demonstrations in Giza against police violence. On 10 September 2020, he was brought before the Public Prosecutor and is accused of "spreading false information". The Public Prosecutor did not clarify what the charge relates to, except that it falls under case 855, the same case under which human right defenders

[Mohamed El-Baqer](#), [Esraa Abdel Fattah](#) and [Mahienour El-Masry](#) are under investigation. On 4 October 2020, the Public Prosecution renewed his preventive detention for an additional 15 days, with neither the human rights defender nor his lawyer permitted to attend the renewal session.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the detention of Kamal Elbalshy and human rights defender Islam El Kalhy, and believes they are being targeted in a further attempt to limit space for freedom of expression and target those who call out human rights abuses in Egypt. It is furthermore concerned that Kamal Elbalshy was disappeared for a period of ten days and both he and Islam El Kalhy have not had access to their lawyers since their arrest

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Egypt to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Kamal Elbalshy and Islam El Kalhy, and drop the charges against them, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Kamal Elbalshy and Islam El Kalhy , while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the '*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Allow Kamal Elbalshy and Islam El Kalhy immediate and unfettered access to their family and lawyers;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Egypt and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.