

URGENT ACTION

EGYPTIAN ARBITRARILY DETAINED FOR ROLE IN MOVIE

On 20 December 2025, Egyptian national and Danish resident Hassan El Sayed was arrested upon his arrival at Cairo International Airport. National Security Agency officials questioned him about his role in the movie *The Eagles of the Republic*, where he appeared very briefly as a priest. Following his arrest, he was taken before a prosecutor, who ordered his pretrial detention pending investigations into the charge of “joining a terrorist group while being aware of its objectives”. Since then, his pretrial detention in case No. 4529 of the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) has been renewed. The Egyptian authorities must immediately release Hassan El Sayed and drop all charges against him as he is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights. Authorities must allow him to safely reunite with his family in Denmark.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Public Prosecutor Mohamed Shawky Ayyad

Office of the Public Prosecutor, Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt;

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Dear Counsellor,

*I write to you to express my grave concern over the arrest and arbitrary detention of Hassan El Sayed since 20 December 2025. Hassan El Sayed was travelling from Denmark to Egypt with his 15-year-old daughter for the holidays. Security forces questioned him about his appearance in the movie *the Eagles of the Republic* released in May 2025 during the Cannes Film Festival. The movie was never screened in Egypt due to its criticism of the political system. Hassan El Sayed has a twenty second appearance in the movie as Coptic Christian priest.*

*Following his arrest, Hassan El Sayed was subjected to enforced disappearance for five days, between 20 and 25 December. During this period, his family had no information about his fate or whereabouts. It was later revealed that security forces took him to the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) on 22 December, where he was questioned by a prosecutor without a lawyer present. Since his arrest, Hassan El Sayed has appeared on seven occasions before the SSSP in online hearings that last only a few minutes. During one such hearings, the prosecutor questioned him about why he had a beard, which Hassan El Sayed interpreted as an accusation of affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood. He explained that he was covering a scar from a throat surgery and asked how this could indicate a connection to the Muslim Brotherhood. The prosecutor also asked Hassan El Sayed on two separate occasions about his minor appearance in the movie *the Eagles of the Republic*. He continues to be held in pretrial detention pending investigations into unfounded charges of “joining a terrorist group while being aware of its objectives”, which is punishable by up to 15 years of imprisonment.*

Hassan El Sayed is currently detained in the 10th of Ramadan prison. His lawyer is barred from visiting him and can only communicate with him during online hearings. Hassan El Sayed's family last visited him on 14 March, and said that while he was physically stable, his mental health was severely impacted by his detention. He was held in isolation for the first 15 days in 10th of Ramadan prison without access to this lawyer and family. He is extremely worried that he could face years in prison for appearing in a movie.

I urge you to ensure that Hassan El Sayed is immediately and unconditionally released and all charges against him are dropped as he is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights. I also urge you to ensure that he is allowed to reunite with his family in Denmark. Pending his release, he must be held in conditions meeting international standards for the treatment of prisoners and granted access to adequate healthcare, as well as his family and lawyers.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Hassan El Sayed is a 60-year-old Egyptian citizen and Danish resident. He has been residing in Denmark for nearly 40 years; he has a wife and two kids who all hold Danish citizenship. Before his arrest he worked as a property caretaker in Copenhagen. Prior to that, he worked for the Library of Nørrebro, part of Copenhagen public libraries for nearly twenty years. Before his arrest on 20 December 2025, Hassan El Sayed had travelled to Egypt freely.

According to his relatives, Hassan El Sayed likes to act in movies as a hobby. He played small roles in some Danish movies as well as in the movie *Boy from Heaven* by the same director as *Eagles of the Republic*. The movie *Eagles of the Republic* is political thriller that satirizes state propaganda and portrays authoritarian practices in Egypt, including the role of the military. None of the films in director Tarik Saleh's Cairo trilogy, namely the Nile Hilton Incident, *Boy from Heaven*, and *Eagles of the Republic*, screened commercially in Egypt. Amnesty International is not aware of official statements confirming the censorship of the films, but media reports indicate that the films were not granted screening licenses in Egypt. In practice, politically sensitive films are denied screening licenses by the General Authority for Censorship of Works of Art, under the ministry of culture.

According to Hassan El Sayed's family, he does not have any history of political or other activism. His family noted that when he agreed to appear in the *Eagles of the Republic* film, he did not have access to the full screenplay or an overview of the film's storyline. His involvement was limited strictly to the specific lines assigned to him for the brief scene in which he appeared.

Hassan El Sayed is currently detained in the 10th of Ramadan prison. Amnesty International has documented the [cruel and inhuman](#) conditions of detention inside the 10th of Ramadan prison (section 6). According to lawyers and relatives of detainees, all detainees are deprived of sunlight and only permitted daily exercise indoors. Based on research into 16 prisons across Egypt, Amnesty International previously [found](#) that prison officials in Egypt are subjecting prisoners of conscience and others held for political reasons to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment through conditions of detention and are deliberately denying them health care to punish dissent.

Egyptian authorities have demonstrated a persistent lack of tolerance for actual or perceived dissent, targeting journalists, activists, lawyers, opposition politicians and other individuals who criticize government policies or denounce the authorities' widespread human rights violations. Amnesty International has documented repeated waves of arrests and prosecutions of people solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Those detained in politically motivated cases are frequently subjected to prolonged arbitrary detention, including extended pre-trial detention renewed automatically by prosecutors and judges without meaningful judicial review. Amnesty International has also repeatedly raised concerns about systematic violations of fair trial rights in Egypt, particularly in cases of a political nature, including the right to a lawyer of one's choosing particularly during the initial questioning by the police, the right to adequate defence, the right not to self-incriminate and to presumption of innocence, the right to a fair and public hearing before a competent, impartial and independent tribunal, and the right to be protected from torture and other ill-treatment.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 16 September 2026

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Hassan El Sayed (He/Him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: First UA