

Mr. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
President
Arab Republic of Egypt

25 November 2019

Unexplained raid on Mada Masr and detention of journalists

Dear Mr. President,

The International Press Institute (IPI), a global network of editors, media executives and journalists for press freedom, is appalled at the [raids](#) on the offices of Mada Masr, an award-winning independent news organization, and the detention of its staff by the security forces.

While expressing our protest against the high-handed action of the security forces against the media organization and journalists, we urge your government to make public the reasons for the raid and detention of the journalists, who were subsequently released.

The office of Mada Masr was raided around 1.30 p.m. on Sunday, November 24, and its staff was detained inside the office. The officials of the security forces searched the office, confiscated mobile phones, computers and other equipment and took the chief editor, Lina Attalah, managing editor Mohamed Hamama, and reporter Rana Mamdouh into custody. All those present in the office were asked to unlock their phones and computers, while being confined to the newsroom. Attalah, Hamama and Mamdouh were taken to Dokki police station, handcuffed to each other and driven around in a police truck until they were released around 6.15 p.m.

Earlier, on Friday, the security forces had picked up Mada Masr editor, Shady Zalat, from his home after confiscating his laptop and phone. He too was released on Sunday, after spending the night in detention without being charged with any crime.

We find it extremely disturbing that your government is violating the core principles of democracy and showing complete disregard for the rule of law by engaging in a campaign to harass, intimidate and silence independent media organizations and journalists, who are critical of your administration.

The raid on Mada Masr reportedly came after the news organization published a report on how your eldest son, Mahmoud a-Sisi is being [side-lined](#) in General Intelligence Service (GIS) and shifted to the Egyptian embassy in Moscow owing to his supposed poor performance in reigning in independent media to support the government.

Mada Masr received the 2019 IPI Free Media Pioneer award for courageously delivering independent, investigative coverage to a public otherwise starved of it. The government is annihilating freedom of expression in the country by clamping down on media organizations that speak truth to power and do not sing your praise.

Media organizations that are not owned by the GIS have been targeted by the security forces in a bid to silence them. The government has also blocked access to many websites including the BBC online and the US government's Arabic website al-Hurra.



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As per information gathered by IPI, some [57 journalists](#) are currently in prison. Mahmoud Hussein of Al Jazeera has been in prison for over 1,070 days, whereas Ismail Alexandrani has spent over 1,400 in detention. A freelance journalist, Abdullah Shousha, was arrested on 22 September 2013 and has spent over 2,200 days in jail.

We hear that the actual number of journalists currently held in prison in Egypt may be even higher, but their families are too afraid to speak out about them for the fear of reprisal.

The actions of your government to intimidate, harass and close down independent media, while arresting journalists and detaining them in inhumane conditions are highly deplorable.

As an international press freedom organization, we urge you to release all journalists who are imprisoned without further delay and uphold the rule of law in Egypt and order the security forces to end harassment and intimidation of news organizations, including the highly respected Mada Masr.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Barbara Trionfi'.

Barbara Trionfi
Executive Director