

Paris, 22 July 2025

Today marks a sad day for freedom of expression. It is the one-year anniversary of the unlawful arrest and “pre-trial detention” of Egyptian cartoonist Ashraf Omar.

On July 22nd, 2024, a Cairo activist, cartoonist, and translator named Ashraf Omar was taken from his home by plainclothes officers. Forty-eight hours elapsed before there was any official acknowledgment of his arrest or confirmation of his wellbeing or location.

Mr. Omar was subjected to physical violence and verbal abuse, as well as a six-hour interrogation during which he was questioned concerning cartoons that had been published in the independent news outlet, Al Manassa. He was asked why he had drawn them, and whether his intent was to incite dissent in the general population. Ultimately, he was charged with “joining a terrorist group while being aware of its purposes, disseminating and publishing rumours and false news and information, and abuse of social media.”

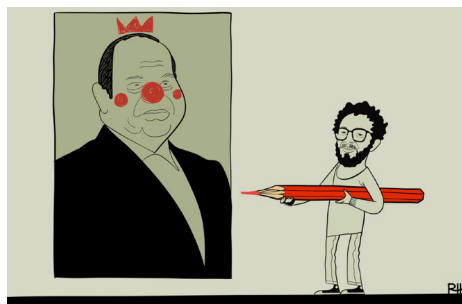
Placed in “pre-trial detention”, Mr. Omar has spent the intervening year in a cycle of frustrating, cruel, and unjust procedural limbo. Relying on COVID-19 measures that have never been rescinded, his “hearings” take place exclusively over video conference-call with no opportunity for defence attorney and client to confer. Initially every fifteen, then every forty-five days, these brief convenings always have the same purpose: to rubber-stamp another extension without presentation or consideration of any argument or evidence.

In addition, on January 16th, 2025, his wife Nada Mougheeth was arrested and charged with “spreading false rumours” about his arrest and, like him, “supporting terrorism”. She was released on bail. Her arrest was a clear attempt to intimidate her into silence concerning her husband, who may remain a detainee until the end of 2025, with no sign of a trial date.

Presently a total of seventeen journalists are detained in the Egyptian penal system. Charges of «membership of a terrorist organisation» and «spreading false news» are regularly brought against them. Egyptian authorities exercise censorship over independent media outlets, thereby stifling efforts to achieve pluralism. The government uses prolonged and indefinite pre-trial detention against individuals perceived to be political opponents, activists or human rights defenders.



Emad Hajjaj (Jordan)



Ramsés (Cuba)



Placide (France)

The last twelve months have seen a proliferation of this characterisation of anti-establishment expression as amounting to crimes against the state, as well as the license that gives to abandon the rights of the accused. We might mention:

- **Mohammed Al Hazza**, handed a twenty-three-year prison sentence in Riyadh, charged with “insulting” the state with cartoons published in Qatar;
- **Kibet Bull**, among the many young protestors disappeared from the streets of Nairobi;
- **Fahmi Reza**, summoned for questioning under the sedition act in Kuala Lumpur and since subjected to a travel ban;
- and lastly those staffers from **LeMan** magazine in Istanbul, currently held, as well as one still wanted by Turkish authorities, accused of “inciting hatred” and under investigation for accepting foreign funds to act as a fifth column.

It may therefore be asserted that the variety of authoritarianism that entails arbitrary detentions and denial of due legal process is the ultimate destination of any government that seeks to conflate non-violent dissent and protest with the enacting and support of terrorism. This is most obviously and keenly felt in the context of Gaza, a topic that is becoming increasingly hard to comment upon, earnestly or satirically without risking demonisation, censure, or criminalisation.

Freedom of expression is suffering an assault on a mass scale, all over the world. Ashraf Omar personifies the struggle. He is an honest man and was engaged in an ordinary and reasonable activity before a brutal regime chose to recast him as a “terrorist”.

Cartoonists – beacons of free expression around the world – are showing their support for Ashraf Omar, reminding all of the special power in their work. Cartoons prompt people to think, reflect, criticize... and laugh. They are by no means a threat, as many wish to present them.

The undersigned organisations declare their commitment that Ashraf Omar will not be forgotten and take this sad occasion to mark a year of his life wasted, and once again call for an immediate end to his detention and a swift conclusion to the baseless prosecution of both Ashraf Omar and Nada Mougheeth.

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| • Cartooning for Peace | • European Cartoon Award |
| • Cartoonists Rights | • ForHum |
| • Al Manassa | • Freemuse |
| • Reviewed & Cleared | • Freedom Cartoonists |
| • Artists at Risk Connection | • Index on Censorship |
| • Association of Canadian Cartoonists | • Kyiv Club of Cartoonists |
| • Australian Cartoonists Association | • Pakistan Union of Cartoonists |
| • Cartoon Movement | • Reporters without borders |
| • Cartoonists Co-operative | • Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights |
| • Cagle Cartoons | • Toons Mag |
| • Committee to Protect Journalists | • United Sketches |
| • Columbia Global Freedom of Expression | |

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