

H.E. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Abedine Palace
Cairo
Egypt

Brussels, 20 April 2015

Re: Concerns regarding the harassment of Ms Azza Soliman, a lawyer

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it also has associate and observer representatives from a further thirteen European countries' bars.

The CCBE places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. We are particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

The CCBE writes to express its concerns over the situation of a lawyer, Ms Azza Soliman, who has been recently subjected to harassment and intimidation by the Egyptian prosecution authorities. Ms Soliman is a prominent Egyptian human rights defender and a director of the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA).

We have been informed that on 24 January 2015, Ms Soliman went to the Public Prosecutor's Office to give testimony regarding the violent dispersal of a protest organised on the same day in Cairo, which had led to the death of one person. Upon finishing her testimony, the human rights defender was interrogated by a prosecutor who later informed her she was under investigation for charges relating to "unauthorised protests" and "breach of security and public order". Ms Soliman was then released, pending investigation, along with other witnesses facing the same charges.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention the following Articles of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

Article 16 states that:

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economics or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Furthermore, Article 23 states that:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to review and ensure that no charges are brought against Ms Azza Soliman, and to guarantee her security and physical integrity. In addition, the CCBE requests you to take all necessary measures to guarantee that all lawyers in Egypt are entitled to freedom of expression without fear of reprisal, hindrance, intimidation or harassment.

I look forward to hearing from your Excellency urgently.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. ŚLAZAK', enclosed within a large, thin, hand-drawn oval.

Maria ŚLAZAK
President