

Mahmoud Tawfiq Abdel Gawad Qandel
Minister of Interior of Egypt
Ministry of Interior
First Settlement - New Cairo.
Cairo, Egypt.



Dear Minister Tawfiq,

I am writing to express my extreme concern about plans to forcibly return **Alem Tesfay Abraham** and **Kibrom Adhanom Okbazghi**, two Eritrean nationals arbitrarily detained at al-Qanater Prison for men, north of Cairo, to Eritrea where they would be at risk of arbitrary detention and torture.

On 9 September 2021, prison officials forced them to undergo Covid-19 PCR tests at a hospital outside the prison and sign documents in Arabic that they could not read before informing them about plans to deport them without specifying a date. Security forces arrested 42-year-old Alem Tesfay Abraham at the Salloum border crossing with Libya on 10 March 2012, while 37-year-old Kibrom Adhanom Okbazghi was arrested on 30 December 2013 in North Sinai Governorate. They were fleeing Eritrea to avoid indefinite military conscription.

Avoiding the conscription would mean arbitrary detention at best and could lead to torture. According to their lawyer, they have not been charged with any criminal offence since and have been repeatedly pressured to "voluntarily" return to Eritrea by officials at the migration department of the interior ministry. The two men have refused to do so and have repeatedly requested to register for protection with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

On 23 July 2020, three UN independent experts wrote to the Egyptian government raising concerns about the two men's prolonged arbitrary detention and denial of the right to seek asylum. According to a refugee rights activist, prison officials verbally and physically assaulted the two men and threatened to deport them shortly after this communication. Going ahead with plans to deport them would violate the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning anyone to a place where they would be at real risk of torture and other serious human rights violations.

Therefore, **I ask you to immediately halt any plans to forcibly return Alem Tesfay Abraham and Kibrom Adhanom Okbazghi to Eritrea and release them** as they are detained arbitrarily without any legal basis and grant them access to asylum procedures. Pending their release, I urge you to protect them from torture and other ill-treatment and ensure that they are held in conditions in line with international standards for the treatment of prisoners. I urge you to stand with human rights and save the lives of these men.

Respectfully,

Mahmoud Tawfiq Abdel Gawad Qandel
Minister of Interior of Egypt
Ministry of Interior
First Settlement - New Cairo.
Cairo, Egypt.



Danna Houssian
Advocate, at the Organization for World Peace

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arthur Jamo', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Arthur Jamo
Lead Advocate at the Organization for World Peace