# Laila Soueif’s hunger strike exposes British government’s failure over Alaa Abd el-Fattah’s detention



The emotional toll of being separated from a child due to unjust imprisonment is a burden that can scarcely be articulated. Laila Soueif, a mathematics professor and mother of British-Egyptian activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah, epitomises this anguish as she enters the ninth month of her hunger strike, a desperate plea for her son's release from an Egyptian prison where he has endured years of unjust detention. Soueif's act of protest underscores the broader plight of families caught in the crosshairs of political mismanagement and flawed judicial systems, a situation exacerbated by the current government’s lack of decisive action.

At the heart of this distressing narrative lies Alaa Abd el-Fattah, whose continued incarceration stems from a deeply flawed legal process widely condemned, including by United Nations experts. His current ordeal began following a conviction for sharing a social media post concerning torture. Despite technically completing a five-year sentence, he remains behind bars due to bureaucratic delays and a calamitous inaction from the British government. This neglect echoes the plight faced by families like Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who have also navigated a maze of diplomatic failures and political indifference, exposing the fragility of a system that claims to uphold justice.

In a profound expression of motherly love, Laila's ongoing hunger strike highlights the lengths to which she is willing to go to secure her son's freedom. Almost 150 days into her protest, subsisting on little more than herbal tea and rehydration salts, she has faced severe health declines, including dangerously low blood sugar levels that have necessitated hospitalization. Despite medical warnings of life-threatening consequences, she remains adamant in her refusal to cease her protest until there is tangible progress regarding her son’s situation. Her determination starkly contrasts with the alarming inaction from government officials, revealing a disturbing trend of promises left unfulfilled.

Her situation has drawn attention from various quarters, including prominent figures such as Peter Greste, an Australian journalist who once shared a prison cell with Alaa and recently joined Laila in her hunger strike outside Downing Street. Such solidarity underscores the international dimension of Alaa’s plight, as activists rally worldwide to highlight what many view as a dereliction of duty by the British government in addressing its citizen's suffering. Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s commitments to engage with the Egyptian government have yet to yield any results, prompting calls for a strong, assertive response that reflects the urgency of the situation rather than empty rhetoric.

Compounding familial anguish is the role reversal that Laila has experienced. As she fights for Alaa's release, her own children face the torment of watching their mother endure the consequences of her prolonged hunger strike. The tension surrounding her hospital bed is palpable, as her family grapples with the dual burdens of helplessness and despair. The emotional weight of this ongoing struggle amplifies concerns about the responsibilities of government to protect its citizens, revealing the disarray and inefficacy engrained in governmental policies.

As Laila Soueif's condition deteriorates, her struggle amplifies critical questions about the British government's obligations to intervene on behalf of its detained citizens. The implications of her hunger strike, personal and political, may resonate far beyond her immediate experience, inviting scrutiny into the inadequacies of how international human rights cases are handled. Public sentiment is increasingly shifting towards a demand for action that transcends mere assurances, reflecting a growing frustration with the government’s failure to protect its own.

This deeply human struggle—between a mother's unwavering love and a government’s moral failures—poses an urgent and moral question: what must transpire before the promises made to families like Laila's are transformed into substantive action? With pressing implications for foreign policy and citizen rights abroad, the situation continues to evolve, leaving observers around the world longing for a resolution that remains elusive amidst a climate of governmental disappointment.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/laila-soueif-hunger-strike-son-egypt-nazanin-b2762934.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/former-australian-prison-mate-jailed-egyptian-british-dissident-goes-hunger-2025-01-20/> - Peter Greste, an Australian journalist who was imprisoned in Egypt for 400 days, initiated a hunger strike in London to urge the British government to aid in the release of Egyptian-British activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah. Abd el-Fattah, known for his role in the 2011 Arab Spring, was sentenced to five years in prison over a social media post. Greste, who shared a neighbouring prison cell with Abd el-Fattah in 2013, joined Abd el-Fattah's mother, Laila Soueif, in her ongoing hunger strike, demonstrating outside Downing Street to seek a meeting with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The British government has addressed Abd el-Fattah's case with Egyptian authorities, but no resolution has been reached. Greste plans to continue his hunger strike for 21 days. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/former-australian-prison-mate-jailed-egyptian-british-dissident-goes-hunger-2025-01-20/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/feb/26/mother-of-egypt-detainee-alaa-abd-el-fattah-hunger-strike-uk> - Laila Soueif, 68, is seeking the release of her son, the British-Egyptian prize-winning writer Alaa Abd el-Fattah, from a jail in Cairo. She has attempted to protest outside Downing Street for an hour each weekday to keep her son’s cause in the minds of ministers. Soueif was taken to hospital after her hunger strike led to a dangerous fall in her blood sugar levels. Her doctor stated there was an “immediate risk to life including further deterioration or death” and that she was “in particular at high risk of sudden death with continued fasting”. She is under observation at St Thomas’ hospital in central London. Alaa Abd el-Fattah completed his current five-year sentence last September, if his two years in detention before sentencing are taken into account as specified by Egyptian law. It appears that Keir Starmer has been unable to secure a phone call with Sisi to discuss Abd el-Fattah’s fate, despite making requests to do so. Starmer has twice written to Sisi, and the UK’s ambassador to the UN in Geneva raised Abd el-Fattah’s unlawful detention at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Egypt is refusing to provide even British consular access to Abd el-Fattah as it does not recognise dual national status. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/feb/26/mother-of-egypt-detainee-alaa-abd-el-fattah-hunger-strike-uk?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/uk-egypt-mothers-hunger-strike-for-imprisoned-activist-son-alaa-abd-el-fattah-could-be-a-matter-of-life-and-death/> - Laila Soueif, the mother of jailed Egyptian-British activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah, has been hospitalised just hours before the 150th day of her hunger strike in protest of her son’s imprisonment in Egypt. Soueif, 68, has lost nearly 30kg since starting her strike in September. She was admitted to St. Thomas’ hospital after her blood sugar and blood pressure dropped to dangerously low levels. The mathematics professor has survived on herbal tea, black coffee, and rehydration salts since September 29, after Egyptian authorities failed to free Abd el-Fattah on his scheduled release date. Laila met with Prime Minister Keir Starmer on February 14, where he gave his ‘personal commitment’ to securing Alaa’s release. ([amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/uk-egypt-mothers-hunger-strike-for-imprisoned-activist-son-alaa-abd-el-fattah-could-be-a-matter-of-life-and-death/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2025/02/alaa-abd-el-fattahs-mother-laila-soueif-calls-uk-government-help-hunger-strike> - British Prime Minister Keir Starmer met with Laila Soueif in February after months of requests to discuss getting his assistance to release Alaa Abd el-Fattah. Starmer pledged to do 'all that I can' to secure the release of Alaa, saying in a statement: 'We will continue to raise his case at the highest levels of the Egyptian government and press for his release.' As calls by UK’s top leaders for the release of British-Egyptian blogger, coder, and activist Alaa Abd El-Fattah from prison in Cairo continue, Alaa’s mother, math professor Laila Soueif, grows weaker four months into a hunger strike she began in September to keep attention focused on her son and protest the lack of progress in obtaining his release. She has consumed only water, coffee, tea, and rehydration salts for more than 135 days. She is 68 years old, and her condition is becoming dire. ([eff.org](https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2025/02/alaa-abd-el-fattahs-mother-laila-soueif-calls-uk-government-help-hunger-strike?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-calls-egypt-immediately-free-alaa-abdel-fattah-his-mother-hits-100-days-hunger-strike> - Laila Soueif, the mother of jailed British-Egyptian blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah, is on hunger strike to secure her son's release. Abdel Fattah, who was serving a five-year sentence for 'spreading false news', should have been released on 29 September, but remains in jail. His mother, 68-year-old mathematics professor Laila Soueif, has now been on hunger strike for 100 days in a desperate attempt to get the British government to secure his freedom, and is considerably weakened. 'Alaa Abdel Fattah should never have gone to jail in the first place, but now that he has more than served his time he must be immediately released. That 100 days have now passed is a shocking indictment of Britain’s failure to defend its citizen, and of Egypt’s utter disregard for the rule of law. ([rsf.org](https://rsf.org/en/rsf-calls-egypt-immediately-free-alaa-abdel-fattah-his-mother-hits-100-days-hunger-strike?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://apnews.com/article/a3a266594796377fe052f35618152565> - British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has vowed to press the Egyptian government to release Alaa Abd el-Fattah, a British-Egyptian dual national who has been imprisoned for over five years on charges of spreading false news. Starmer made this promise to Laila Soueif, Abd el-Fattah's mother, who has been on a hunger strike for 140 days, consuming only herbal tea, black coffee, and rehydration salts since her son's expected release date on September 29, 2024. Soueif has lost around 25 kilograms in her protest. Abd el-Fattah ... pro-democracy activist involved in the 2011 uprising against former President Hosni Mubarak, has spent much of the past 14 years in prison. His latest imprisonment began in 2019 following a social media post. Despite his dual citizenship, the Egyptian authorities have not released him, extending his detention until January 2027. Starmer has committed to raising Abd el-Fattah's ... Egyptian authorities at the highest levels to secure his release. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/a3a266594796377fe052f35618152565?utm_source=openai))