President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

Your Excellency, Oslo, 15 September 2016

On behalf of the Norwegian Writers in Prison Committee and Norwegian PEN, we express our deepest concerns at the continued imprisonment of writer Ahmed Naji. According to PEN International, “Naji has now served almost seven months of his sentence. Two motions for a stay of execution filed by his lawyers have been rejected and Naji will therefore spend his birthday, 15 September, behind bars”.

After the publication of excerpts from his 2014 novel Istikhdam al-Hayat (The Use of Life), in Akhbar al-Adab magazine, Naji was sentenced in February 2016 to two years in prison for ‘violating public modesty’. We remind the Egyptian authorities that this publication was first sanctioned and approved by the Publications Censorship Authority, and that Naji’s fiction is protected under his right to freedom of expression. This right is not only enshrined in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is a state party, but also within articles 65 ad 67 of Egypt’s own Constitution, which guarantee freedom of thought and opinion and freedom of artistic and literary creation.

We call for the immediate and unconditional release of Naji, as well as all other writers and journalists currently detained in Egypt in connection with their peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, and urge the Egyptian authorities to reconsider their application of article 178 of the penal code. We believe that article 178, which criminalizes content that violates public morals, is being unduly used to impose restrictions on freedom of expression that exceed those delineated under international law.

Yours sincerely,



Ms Brit Bildøen Ms Iva Gavanski  
Chair of Writers in Prison Committee Advisor, Writers in Prison Committee  
Norwegian PEN Norwegian PEN

Copy: The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Oslo, 15.09.2016