

OPEN LETTER TO BE PUBLISHED IN NEWSPAPERS AND ONLINE

As the world prepares for the COP27 International Climate Conference in Egypt we, as Nobel laureates, write to urge the world not to forget about the many thousands of political prisoners held in Egypt's prisons – most urgently, the Egyptian-British writer and philosopher, Alaa Abd el-Fattah, now six months into a hunger strike and at risk of death.

Alaa has spent the last ten years - a quarter of his life - in prison, for words he has written. For his essays, social media posts and speeches and for the ideas he has put forward into the world, ideas about democracy and the law, technology and labour – ideas that should be celebrated, but instead have cost him his freedom.

As Nobel laureates, we believe in the world-changing power of words and the need to defend them if we are to build a more sustainable, genuinely fairer future

We urge all representatives of governments, environmental groups and businesses to use the means at their disposal to help those most vulnerable, not just to the rising seas, but to the imprisoned and forgotten. A just transition cannot solely concerned with bringing down emissions, but must be a transition away from exploitation and coercion.

If the world gathers in Egypt and leaves without even a word about the most vulnerable, then what hope can they ever have? If COP27 ends up a silent gathering, where no one risks speaking openly for fear of angering the COP Presidency, then what future is it that will be being negotiated over?

We understand well what is at stake with the negotiations and their urgency. But it is not through compromise with authoritarianism that crises are averted. We believe that it is through more democracy, more transparency and more civic participation that the truest route to sustainability lies.

We ask you to raise their names, to call for their freedom, and to invite Egypt to turn a page and become a true partner in building a different future: a future that respects human life and dignity. We ask everyone support the call from Egyptian and international human rights groups for a prisoner amnesty. We ask you to read the words of Alaa, whose powerful voice for democracy is close to being extinguished. If words are to hold their importance, then we must all stand up for them.

As he wrote in 2019:

“The crisis is not one of awareness, but of surrender to the inevitability of inequality. If the only thing that unites us is the threat, then everyone will move to defend their interests. But if we collect around a hope in a better future, a future where we put an end to all forms of inequality, this global awareness will be transformed into positive energy.

Hope, here, is necessary. Our dreams will probably not come to pass, but if we submit to our nightmares we'll be killed by fear before the Flood.”

Indeed, we cannot surrender to the inevitability of inequality. We cannot yield the possibility of a different future to an amoral managerialism of crisis. We must ensure that our words are

spoken in defence of the most vulnerable – because we know that our silence puts them at greater risk.

Yours Sincerely,

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