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*The Rector*

Rectors  
Una Europa Alliance

Bologna, February the 12th, 2020

RE: request of support for the student at the University of Bologna arrested at Cairo

Dear Rectors, dear colleagues,

As you may have heard, Patrick George Zaky, a graduate student at the University of Bologna and a gender and human rights researcher at the Cairo-based Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), was in Egypt to see his family and was arrested at Cairo airport. The EIPR declared he was covertly taken from the airport and interrogated at facilities belonging to Egypt's national security agency in Cairo and Mansoura, his home town. Finally, the EIPR and Amnesty International claim that Zaky is being tortured and questioned about his activity as researcher (and activist), however, an independent verification of such claims is still ongoing.

As soon as we were informed about the case, the University of Bologna immediately took action by creating an internal crisis group that started to work with the relevant authorities and stakeholders. The University promptly got in touch with the Italian Ministry of the University. The Ministry of Internal affairs and the Italian Embassy in Cairo were also alerted through our Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The attention drawn by Italy has activated the European External Action Service (EEAS), the body that manages the European Union's diplomatic relations with other countries outside the EU, which ensures appropriate action will be taken.

The University of Bologna is closely monitoring the development of the situation and hopes that this case will have a quick and positive outcome, in full transparency and completeness of information and in full respect of Human's rights.

Patrick George Zaky won a scholarship, after a rigorous selection, to participate in the prestigious Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women and Gender Studies (GEMMA), coordinated by the University of Granada (Spain) with the participation of the University of Bologna, Central European University, University of Lodz, University of Oviedo, University of Utrecht and University of York.

Since he has started to attend the degree programme at the University of Bologna last September, Patrick has actively participated in the course activities showing great enthusiasm, competence and professionalism. The teachers and students who knew him portray him very differently from what the Egyptian authorities seem to suggest.

The University of Bologna together with the other universities of the GEMMA consortium, hopes that Patrick will be able to return to Bologna as soon as possible to resume his studies in the second semester and then continue his education project next year, as he had planned.

I am writing you because we think that EUA may support us in protecting the principles of academic freedom and human rights. Therefore, the University of Bologna is asking EUA to take the necessary actions in terms of communication and awareness, to allow our student to safely return to Italy.

Looking forward to hearing from you

Francesco Ubertini  
