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Dear Minister,

I am writing to express 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, prison officials forced them to undergo Covid-19 PCR tests at a hospital outside the prison and to sign documents in Arabic that they were unable to 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. 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 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, shortly after this communication, prison officials verbally and physically assaulted the two men, and threatened to deport them. 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.

I therefore ask you to immediately halt any plans to forcibly return Alem Tesfay Abraham and Kibrom Adhanom Okbazghi to Eritrea, 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.

Yours sincerely,