

June 21, 2014

Your Excellency President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi,

On behalf of the international correspondents in Cairo, we write to ask respectfully that you consider the release or pardon of our jailed colleagues Mohamed Fahmy, Peter Greste and Baher Mohamed.

We understand the vital importance of judicial independence. Regardless of the specific allegations, we also believe that the punishment of the three journalists would have a gravely harmful effect on freedom of expression and the free press---values celebrated in Egypt's new constitution and around the world.

All three journalists are highly regarded professionals who have previously distinguished themselves for well-known international news organizations. Mohamed Fahmy previously worked at CNN. Peter Greste worked for the BBC. Baher Mohamed worked for the Asahi Shimbun, one of Japan's largest and most prestigious news organizations, until April, 2013.

None of the three has any history of violence. None has any history of affiliation with, or sympathy for, groups accused of violence. None have belonged to any political movement.

Mohamed Fahmy, who spent much of his life in the West, marched with other Egyptians on June 30, 2013 to ask for a change of government and on July 26, 2013 in support of Egypt's new leadership. Peter Greste is an Australian new to Egypt. He had spent only a few days in Egypt or any other Arab country before his arrest.

All three have now spent six months in prison awaiting their trial and its conclusion. They have already paid a heavy price for an alleged offense that---according to the worst possible accusations---involved only words and pictures, not guns and bombs.

Mohamed Fahmy has been unable to receive adequate physiotherapy for an injured shoulder, and as a result he has permanently lost his full range of motion in one arm. Baher Mohamed is awaiting the birth of his third child.

As journalists, we support the release of all of our Egyptian or international colleagues who may be imprisoned for doing what they believed to be their jobs. Before the inauguration of your Excellency, the Committee to Protect Journalists counted sixteen journalists in Egyptian jails.

One of them, Abdullah Elshamy, was released this week for humanitarian reasons, because of his failing health. We very much appreciate his release. It has encouraged our hopes of freedom and clemency for others.

The case of Mohamed Fahmy, Peter Greste and Baher Mohamed is unique because of their respected careers at prestigious international news organizations. Most of the international correspondents working in Cairo know at least one of them personally. Their case has drawn the attention of the world.

The case is also now urgent because the court is scheduled to deliver its verdict on June 23.

Adly Mansour, the current president of the Supreme Constitutional Court and the former interim president, has also expressed support for a swift return of the journalists to their families.

“Notwithstanding the independence of the judiciary authority and foremost all the rights guaranteed by the law,” Mr. Mansour wrote in a public letter to the family of Peter Greste, “I would like to assure you in my capacity as president of Egypt that I will spare no effort to work toward the speedy resolution of the case in a fashion consistent with the law and that guarantees the reunion of the family in the near future.”

Whatever the verdict, we firmly believe that the release of the journalists—by acquittal, presidential pardon or some other act of clemency--- will send a positive message to Egypt and the world. It will demonstrate the confidence and stability of the government as well as an appreciation of the important role of journalism.

We respectfully request that you use whatever legal powers you can as the elected president to help secure the release of our three colleagues.

Sincerely,

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