

February 26, 2014

His Excellency Adly Mahmoud Mansour  
Office of the President  
Al-Ittihadia Palace  
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt  
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Dear President Mansour:

As faculty members of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, we write to protest the continuing detention of, and criminal proceedings directed against, reporters, producers and other news professionals of Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera English.

In 2011, in recognition of its excellence and integrity, the faculty of our school bestowed the Columbia Journalism Award upon Al Jazeera English. This award is given annually to a single organization for practicing "singular journalism in the public interest." Today we are particularly alarmed at the politically-motivated criminal prosecution of this widely-respected network's three staffers Mohamed Fahmy, Peter Grete and Baher Mohammed - veteran news professionals and citizens of three nations - as well as the other Al Jazeera and independent journalists facing charges in this case.

The charges against Al Jazeera/Al Jazeera English staff - such as "holding illegal meetings" with the Muslim Brotherhood - in effect criminalize universally-recognized standards for professional journalism practice, which require that all sides in public disputes and controversies be reported. As teachers of journalism students from around the world, we recognize that Egyptian civil society is in a time of debate and transition, but such times are precisely when the mission of independent journalism is most relevant. Journalism is not terrorism. Neither is dissent whether printed or online.

We also condemn the harsh conditions under which the Al Jazeera English team are being held, described in a letter from Mr. Grete as confining his fellow prisoners "24 hours a day in their mosquito-infested cells, sleeping on the floor with no books or writing materials to break the soul-destroying tedium." We note that Mr. Fahmy has been denied medical treatment for a shoulder injury sustained during his arrest, although he requested such treatment as recently as his bail hearing last week.

We urge your Government and the Office of Public Prosecutor to drop this tainted proceeding, and to free all journalists from Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera English, along with any other news-gatherers now in custody.

Respectfully,

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Professor of Professional Practice & Director, Tow Center for Digital Journalism

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Professor

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Note: Faculty members have signed this letter as individuals. This letter does not represent the Trustees of Columbia University.

Cc:

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