

THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB



Committee to Protect Journalists

June 26, 2018

On June 30, a court in Cairo will deliver a verdict in the case of photojournalist Mahmoud Abou Zeid, also known as Shawkan. If convicted, he could receive the death penalty. We, the undersigned organizations, urge United States government officials to call on the Egyptian government to drop all charges against Shawkan and immediately and unconditionally release him, as well as all other imprisoned journalists in the country.

Shawkan was detained August 14, 2013, while covering clashes between Egyptian security forces and supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi for the U.K.-based citizen journalism site and photo agency Demotix. Since then he has been held in Egypt's Tora Prison, enduring dozens of court hearings before being officially charged with baseless, retaliatory offenses in September 2015. In March 2018, the prosecutor in his case requested the death penalty. Shawkan has been diagnosed with Hepatitis C and his health has deteriorated in prison, according to his family. Prison doctors have urged he be moved to a hospital, but these requests have been denied.

For his bravery in the face of danger, Shawkan received the Committee to Protect Journalists' [International Press Freedom Award](#), and the National Press Club's [John Aubuchon Press Freedom Award](#), both in 2016, and this year's UNESCO [Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize](#).

Shawkan's case is representative of the dangers journalists in Egypt face simply for doing their jobs. At least 20 journalists were behind bars as of last December, according to CPJ data, and CPJ has tracked the detention of at least five more since then. Ahead of his reelection in March, Egyptian President Abdelfattah el-Sisi announced that anyone publishing anything critical of the Egyptian armed forces or police was effectively committing "treason," and after the presidential elections Egyptian authorities ramped up their crackdown on the press. On May 22 a military court sentenced journalist and former Wilson Center scholar Ismail Alexandrani to 10 years in prison. The decision is currently awaiting final ratification by a military governor.

Egypt receives at least \$1.3 billion in U.S. aid annually, and is considered a major strategic partner of the U.S. Records on file with the Department of Justice indicate that Egypt has spent millions of dollars in the last two years to enhance its image and win influence on Capitol Hill.

In light of these issues, we urge:

- Members of Congress to use all channels to call for the Egyptian government to drop all charges against Shawkan and immediately and unconditionally release him, as well as other journalists arrested for doing their jobs;
- The State Department to send trial monitors to Shawkan's hearing on June 30 and all cases involving imprisoned journalists;
- President Donald J. Trump and Vice President Mike Pence to make press freedom a central part of their engagement with the Egyptian government, and explicitly call for the release of imprisoned journalists in private and public communications with Egyptian authorities.

A strong bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Egypt must not be perceived by the Egyptian government as a blank check to silence the media and free expression. We urge U.S. government officials to make this clear in all dealings with the Egyptian government.

Signed,

ORGANIZATIONS

Alicia Patterson Foundation
American Society of News Editors
Associated Press Media Editors
Association of Alternative News Media
Belady
Committee to Protect Journalists
Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma
Freedom Initiative
International Press Institute
International Press Institute, North American Committee
Military Reporters and Editors
National Association of Black Journalists
National Press Club
National Press Club Journalism Institute
National Press Foundation
National Press Photographers Association
PEN America
Project on Middle East Democracy
Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting
Radio Television Digital News Association
Reporters Without Borders
Robert F Kennedy Human Rights
Scholars at Risk
White House News Photographers Association

INDIVIDUALS

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