

URGENT ACTION

EGYPTIAN PHOTOJOURNALIST INTERROGATED

Mahmoud Abu Zied, known as Shawkan, has been questioned about a letter he wrote from his cell, which was later posted on Facebook. He has now been detained without charge or trial for over 18 months. He is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his peaceful work as a photojournalist.

Mahmoud Abu Zied was interrogated on 9 February 2015, without his lawyer, by an assistant to the Minister of Interior about a letter he wrote and was later posted on the Facebook page "Freedom for Shawkan", which had been created to campaign for his release. Mahmoud Abu Zied was asked whether he had written the letter, and how he had managed to get the letter out of the prison and post it online. The letter was displayed on Egyptian TV.

Mahmoud Abu Zied's detention was due to be renewed on 15 February. His lawyers asked the Cairo Criminal Court Panel to recuse themselves, as it had kept renewing the pre-trial detention for over a year without valid legal reasons. The court panel referred the request to the Public Prosecutor's Office for a decision on the request. The Cairo Criminal Court renewed Mahmoud Abu Zied's detention order on 26 February for another 45 days.

Mahmoud Abu Zied said in his letter that he was being held on trumped-up accusations, essentially identical to those brought against the other 300 people held in the same case. He also pointed out that others arrested around the same time, such as Aljazeera journalist Abdullah al-Shami, have been released for medical reasons while he has remained in detention without charge or trial for over 550 days. According to his family, his health has deteriorated as he suffers from anaemia. His family have said he is depressed, barely eats, vomits frequently and suffers from insomnia. Mahmoud Abu Zied is isolating himself in his cell, refusing to speak with his cellmates.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the Egyptian authorities to drop all charges against Mahmoud Abu Zied and release him immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to grant him access to his lawyer, including for interrogation;
- Calling on them to provide him with any medical attention he may require;
- Calling on them to protect Mahmoud Abu Zied from torture and other ill-treatment, order independent and impartial investigations into reports that he was beaten in custody, and bring those responsible to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 APRIL 2015 TO:

Public Prosecutor

Hesham Mohamed Zaki Barakat
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Supreme Court House, 1 "26 July" Road
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 577 4716
+202 2 575 7165
(switched off after office hours, GMT+3)

Salutation: Dear Counsellor

Minister of Justice

Mahfouz Saber
Ministry of Justice
Cairo
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2 795 8103
Email: mojob@idsc.gov.eg
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

President of the National Council for
Human Rights
Mohamed Fayek
69 Giza St. – next to the Embassy of
Saudi Arabia
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 3 762 4852

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 243/14. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE12/052/2014/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mahmoud Abu Zied is a freelance photojournalist, professionally known as “Shawkan”, who has contributed to a range of Egyptian and foreign publications, such as the US magazine *Time*, German newspaper *Die Zeit*, and online photo agencies, including Demotix. He is not known to have taken part in any protests or political violence.

After Mohamed Morsi was ousted on 3 July 2013, Mahmoud Abu Zied began taking photos of a large sit-in staged by the former president’s supporters in Rabaa al-Adawiya Square, Nasr City, in the capital, Cairo. Egyptian security forces used excessive, including lethal, force to disperse the sit-in on 14 August, killing hundreds of people. In the ensuing violence, eight members of the security forces also died.

Mahmoud Abu Zied is understood to have been beaten by police and soldiers during his first day under arrest and on 17 August when he was transferred to Abu Zaabal Prison: officers punched and kicked him, and beat him with sticks. He was also kept in a parked truck for eight hours in the very hot sun when he got to Abu Zaabal Prison.

The Egyptian authorities have continued to crack down on journalists covering pro-Morsi demonstrations, as well as those they see as supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Mahmoud Abu Zied could face charges of belonging to a banned group, murder and possessing firearms. His detention has been renewed repeatedly, pending the outcome of the investigation. The charges against him are completely unfounded and he has been detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

The Egyptian Code of Criminal Procedures (CCP) allows for people to be held in provisional detention without charge or trial for up to six months for alleged misdemeanours and an original time limit of 18 months for alleged felonies (Article 143 of the CCP).

However, Article 143 of the CCP was amended in September 2013 by Law 83 of 2013 to remove any time limit for provisional detention for crimes punishable by life imprisonment or death. This decision allows courts to extend provisional detention indefinitely and so for suspects to be held without charge or trial indefinitely. In effect, this measure has reintroduced the practice of administrative detention.

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights uphold the right of all individuals to freedom of expression. This right includes “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”

Name: Mahmoud Abu Zied

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 243/14 Index: MDE 12/0110/2015 Issue Date: 27 February 2015