

Appeal of one-year jail terms given to four Egyptian editors to be heard on World Press Freedom Day



We, the undersigned 40 members and partners of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), are concerned with the ongoing court case against four editors of independent newspapers in Egypt, who face one year in jail if they are not acquitted upon appeal. The case, one of many underway against Egyptian journalists and editors, appears to be an attempt to silence them for critical remarks about the President and other members of government and the ruling party.

Last September, editors Ibrahim Issa, of the daily "Al-Dustour", Wael al-Abrashi, of the weekly "Soat al-Ommah", Adel Hamoda, of the weekly "Al-Fagr", and Abdel Halim Kandeel, former editor of the weekly "Al-Karama", each received a one-year prison sentence after they were found guilty of "publishing false information likely to disturb public order." They appealed their convictions and have been free on bail pending the outcome of the appeal.

On 5 April 2008, the Agouza Court of Appeal postponed the hearing of their appeal to 3 May – coincidentally World Press Freedom Day – in order to receive required documents and reports.

The case started when a lawyer affiliated with the ruling National Democratic Party filed a complaint against them for allegedly defaming President Hosni Mubarak and his top aides, including his son, Gamal Mubarak. On 13 September 2007, Agouza Misdemeanors Court in Cairo issued its decision in the case (1799/2007), sentencing each of the four editors to one year of imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 Egyptian pounds (approx. USD\$3,700.)

The four editors – in chief were sentenced under Article 188 of the Egyptian Penal Code, which stipulates that anyone who "malevolently publishes false news, statements or rumours that are likely to disturb public order" will be punished by imprisonment for up to one year and a fine that would not exceed 20,000 Egyptian Pounds.

Ibrahim Issa is due to appear before an appeals court in Cairo on 18 May in relation to another case. He was sentenced by a misdemeanor court on 26 March to six months in prison for "publishing false information and rumours" about Mubarak's health. Issa was first indicted by the High State Security Prosecutor's Office on 5 September 2007, on allegations of "propagating false news and rumours causing a general security disturbance and harming the public interest" and "intentionally publishing false news that may harm public safety." The indictment was in connection with articles concerning the health of President Mubarak published by Issa between 28 and 30 August 2007.

Accordingly, the undersigned organisations urge the Egyptian authorities to drop all the charges and overturn the politically-motivated prison terms issued against the editors. The Egyptian state should refrain from using the Penal Code to criminalise freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The government must abide by its international obligations as a signatory of international documents related to freedom of expression, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and as outlined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We, the undersigned organisations call upon the Egyptian government and the Egyptian judiciary to respect freedom of the press and to overturn the prison sentences against the four editors—in-chief during the appeal hearing on 3 May 2008, which coincidentally is World Press Freedom Day. People across the whole world celebrate freedom of expression and freedom of the press on 3 May, and it would be a shame to see Egyptian journalists taken to court or jailed for exercising their right to press freedom and free expression on this day.

Signed,

Al Haq Center for Development and Human Rights, Egypt
Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Indonesia
Arab Archives Institute (AAI), Jordan
Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (HRinfo), Egypt
ARTICLE 19, United Kingdom
Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Bahrain
Barik Association Against Violence Against Women, Egypt
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Egypt
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), Canada
Center for Human Rights and Democratic Studies (CEHURDES), Nepal
Conseil National Pour Les Libertés en Tunisie (CNLT), Tunisia
Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement, Egypt
Egyptian Association for the Support of the Democratic Development, Egypt
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Egypt
Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), Egypt
Filastiniyat, Palestine
Forum for Development & Human Rights Dialogue , Egypt
Free Media Movement (FMM), Sri Lanka
Freedom Center for Political Rights and Democracy Support , Egypt
Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), Greece
Habi Center for Environmental Rights, Egypt
Hisham Mubarak Law Center, Egypt



Index on Censorship, UK
Initiative for Freedom of Expression, Turkey
Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (Institute for Press and Society, IPYS) Venezuela
Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS), Azerbaijan
International PEN Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC), UK
Journalists Trade Union (JuHI), Azerbaijan
Land Center for Human Rights, Egypt
Maharat Foundation, Lebanon
Media Institute, Kenya
Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Nigeria
Nadeem Center for Psychological Therapy and Rehabilitation of the Victims of Violence, Egypt
Observatoire pour la liberté de presse, d'édiction et de création (OLPEC), Tunisia
One World Association for Development and Civil Society, Egypt
Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (Mada), Palestine
Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA), Thailand
Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), Syria
World Association of Newspapers (WAN), France
World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC), United States