

## **Egypt: Free journalist Mahmoud Hussein, held for a year in arbitrary detention**

On the eve of the first anniversary of the detention of news producer Mahmoud Hussein, Amnesty International and Reporters without Borders (known internationally as Reporters sans frontières, RSF) are calling on the Egyptian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release him. Mahmoud is detained pending investigations for trumped-up charges solely for doing his job as a journalist and therefore a prisoner of conscience.

Mahmoud Hussein is an Egyptian news producer with Al Jazeera network. On 20 December 2016, while travelling back to Cairo for a vacation, he was interrogated at the airport for four hours and had his passport confiscated. Two days later, an officer from the National Security Agency told him to present himself at their offices in order to retrieve his passport. When he obliged on 23 December, he was arrested and that night taken in handcuffs by security forces to his home, which they raided, and took footage of, before taking him back to jail.

The State Security Prosecutor ordered his detention on 23 December on charges of “publishing false information”, “receiving foreign funding” and “belonging to a banned group”. He denies all the charges against him. Amnesty International and RSF consider that he is being punished solely for doing his work as a journalist and therefore held arbitrarily. The Prosecutor has renewed his detention periodically, the latest renewal being on 14 December 2017, for 45 days.

Egypt’s Interior Ministry said in a statement issued on 25 December 2016 that Mahmoud Hussein was being held on charges of “incitement against state institutions and broadcasting false news with the aim of spreading chaos”. They said he worked with Al Jazeera to produce “fake documentaries” about the country’s institutions.

Mahmoud Hussein’s family were first able to see him only two months after his arrest, in February 2017. He recounted being held in a solitary cell without any source of ventilation, except a small hatch in the cell door that could only be opened or closed by guards operating it from outside. When he broke his arm in an accident in June, prison authorities refused to move him to an outside hospital. The cell lacked a toilet or sanitation facilities and he complained that the stench was so unbearable he suffered from shortness of breath.

Mahmoud Hussein is one of at least 15 jailed Egyptian journalists facing spurious charges. Among them are Mahmoud Abu Zeid, also known as Shawkan, a photojournalist, Ismail al-Iskandrani, a journalist and researcher, and Hisham Gaafar, a journalist. All three have been held in prolonged pre-trial detention. Shawkan’s health has deteriorated while in detention. Hisham Gaafar has been suffering from optic nerve atrophy in both eyes and an enlarged prostate.

Egyptian authorities have blocked access to at least 465 websites since 24 May 2017 according to the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, including 97 websites of news and human rights organizations, including RSF. Egypt is ranked 161st out of 180 countries in RSF’s 2017 [World Press Freedom Index](#).

Amnesty International and RSF reiterate their calls to the Egyptian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Mahmoud Hussein and all journalists who have been imprisoned solely for exercising their profession or for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, and to ensure that all detainees have access to adequate health care.