

Do not criminalise media workers - UN

UN experts have condemned the decision to seek the death sentence against Egyptian photojournalist Abou Zeid, who was arrested in August 2013 while covering clashes between Egyptian security forces and supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi.



#FreeShawkan

UN human rights experts strongly condemn a decision by the Egyptian prosecutor to seek the death sentence against acclaimed photojournalist Mahmoud Abou Zeid, known as “Shawkan”, who was arrested while covering anti-government protests.

Abou Zeid was arrested in August 2013 while covering clashes between Egyptian security forces and supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi. He has been charged with weapons possession and murder, amongst others. He remains in detention.

“Journalists and media workers covering protests should not be criminalized for their professional duties and they certainly should not be facing the death penalty for doing so,” said the UN experts.

“Calling for the death penalty after unfair procedures is unacceptable: it is a derelict of legal duties, as well as a violation of international law,” they said, adding the imposition of the death penalty under such conditions would amount to an arbitrary deprivation of life.

“Freedom of expression is a fundamental right protected by international law for which no one should risk detention and the death sentence. It is also a collective right which empowers populations through participation and democracy.

“Egypt must ensure that journalists are able to express their views and disseminate information without fear of intimidation, harassment or prosecution of any sort. We call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately release and put an end to Abou Zeid’s groundless prosecution.”

In 2016, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention recommended that Zeid be released immediately, and awarded the right to seek compensation.

On 26 January 2018, several UN experts called on Egypt to halt all pending executions following repeated allegations of unfair trials.

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