

June 25, 2014

UNIFOR STATEMENT ON JAILED JOURNALISTS

Unifor, which represents journalists across Canada, is shocked at the harsh sentences handed down in Egypt to three Al Jazeera journalists – including one Canadian – who were simply doing their jobs.

Journalism is not a crime. It is essential to the workings of a functioning democracy that citizens have access to fair and balanced accounts of the issues facing their country. To achieve that, journalists need to know that they can do their jobs without fear of harassment, much less prosecution.

The Egyptian regime, by jailing Canadian Mohamed Fahmy and his colleagues Peter Greste and Baher Mohamed, has shown no commitment to such principles. In fact, it has shown the opposite. The current government, which came to power almost a year ago after overthrowing the democratically elected government of Mohammad Morsi, has shown the world that it values repression over press freedom.

Also disturbing, however, has been the tepid response to the sentences by the Conservative Harper government. As a Canadian sits in jail, enduring horrible conditions in a foreign country, his government should be spurred to come to his defense and demand that the ridiculous conviction and sentence be overturned. All three journalists should be freed in a presidential pardon.

While other governments around the world have condemned the sentences in the strongest possible language, the best the Harper government could manage was a statement about its “disappointment” at the jail terms handed out.

Canadian journalists, including members of Unifor, work around the globe in often-dangerous places to get the full story on what is happening in the world. They need to know that their government will be there for them, should trouble arise.

Therefore, Unifor calls on the Egyptian government to free Canadian Mohamed Fahmy and his colleagues Peter Greste and Baher Mohamed, and calls on the Canadian federal government to condemn Egypt for these atrocities.