

Egyptian court sentences *Al Jazeera* journalists

An Egyptian court has handed down a three-year prison sentence at the retrial of three Al Jazeera journalists accused of supporting the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.



The case has aroused international condemnation.

An Egyptian court on Saturday gave three Al Jazeera journalists a three-year prison sentence on charges of broadcasting false news and working without permits, in a retrial called after an initial verdict was overturned by an appeals court.

Al Jazeera immediately condemned Saturday's court decision, calling it a "deliberate attack on press freedom."

The broadcaster's English acting director-general, Mostefa Souag, said the verdict "defies logic and common sense," adding that the "whole case has been heavily politicised and has not been conducted in a free and fair manner."

Canadian national Mohammed Fahmy, Australian journalist Peter Greste and Egyptian producer Baher Mohammed had initially been accused of supporting the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood while covering events following the ouster of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi for the Qatar-based broadcaster.

Fahmy's lawyer, Amal Clooney, who had arrived to represent him for the first time in Saturday's proceedings, told DW that she might appeal to an international court following the retrial verdict.

Overtured verdicts

The journalists were sentenced to seven years in prison in June 2014, while Mohammed was given an additional three years after police searching his home found a bullet that he had picked up while reporting on clashes between Brotherhood supporters and security forces.

An appeals court overturned the verdicts, after finding there to be a scarcity of evidence against the journalists.

Greste was deported in February after serving 400 days, and was being retried in absentia, while both Fahmy and Mohamed have been out on bail since the retrial began in February. Fahmy, who had both Egyptian and Canadian citizenship, dropped the Egyptian one in the hope of being deported like Greste.

Previous hearings for a verdict in the retrial have been delayed several times.

Press freedom in danger?

Egyptian authorities have cracked down heavily on the Brotherhood after Morsi, one of its members, was ousted by the military in mid-2013. The journalists were accused of being mouthpieces for the group and of airing falsified footage aimed at damaging national security.

All three men denied the charges, saying they were simply doing their job as reporters.

The case has drawn international condemnation of the Egyptian authorities for appearing to repress freedom of the press. Al-Jazeera's Arabic channel had shown support for Morsi and Islamists, but Fahmy, Greste and Mohamed all worked for the broadcaster's English service.

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