



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Greste, Mr Peter

SPEECH

Monday, 23 February 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Thistlethwaite, Matt, MP

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Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (09:55): I am pleased to speak in support of this great motion, which congratulates all those concerned with the release of Peter Greste. Peter Greste went to al-Jazeera's Cairo bureau in December 2013 to cover for a colleague. He expected to be there for a couple of weeks. The result was a horror 400 days in an Egyptian jail—an unjust, demoralising ordeal for someone who was simply doing his job. Peter Greste is an award-winning international correspondent. He has worked in Kabul, Belgrade, London, Mexico, Santiago, the Middle East and Africa.

On 29 December 2013, he and his colleagues Mohamed Fadel Fahmy and Baher Mohamed were arrested by Egyptian police and accused of reporting views which were 'damaging to national security in Egypt'. The reality is that Peter Greste and his al-Jazeera colleagues were pawns in a political dispute concerning Middle Eastern politics. At his trial, there was a clear lack of evidence to substantiate the charges that were brought against Greste and his colleagues. We saw the farcical incidents of the prosecutor presenting video evidence of alleged contraventions of Egyptian law, when the videos were clearly filmed in countries other than Egypt. Nevertheless, despite the inconsistencies with the evidence, despite the misgivings of the trial, Greste and his colleagues were convicted and sentenced on 23 June 2014. Greste and Fahmy received seven-year sentences and Mohamed a 10-year sentence.

In the wake of the sentences there was justified international condemnation, and the international campaign under the banner of 'Journalism is not a crime' thankfully began throughout the world. The campaign received wonderful support internationally through social media and through human rights groups; through the work of journalists supporting their colleagues whom they saw as being unjustly targeted and jailed; through the work of international organisations, in particular the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights; and through the work of many, many colleagues of the parliament and the bipartisan support for the release and the overturning of the convictions.

I want to pay tribute in particular to the very dedicated and professional staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Egypt and Australia who, we all know, worked around the clock and provided invaluable advice not only to the minister but also to Peter's family and to those working to secure their release. You deserve the praise and thanks of all Australians. I thank all of our parliamentary colleagues who joined the campaign, from all sides of politics, to work to secure Peter's release. I pay tribute to Peter's family for their unstinting loyalty and their hard work and dedication to their son and brother.

We also do not forget Mohamed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed. Although they have been released on bail, their retrial begins today. As we have said from the beginning, being a journalist is not a crime. Journalists should not be put on trial or locked up for doing their job. We continue to campaign and urge the Egyptian government to release Peter Greste's two colleagues, Baher Mohamed and Mohamed Fahmy. Our thoughts also go to the hundreds of journalists around the world who remain imprisoned. So long as their freedom is diminished, so too is our own.