

Sarkozy urged to push Egypt on media laws

France urged to link cooperation with Egypt to better respect for human rights.

Paris - French President Nicolas Sarkozy has been urged to intercede on behalf of imprisoned blogger Abdel Kareem Nabil Suleiman and imprisoned journalist Abd al-Munim Gamal al Din Abd al-Munim when he receives a visit from his Egyptian counterpart, Hosni Mubarak, on 2 August.

Reporters Without Borders has sent a letter to the French president, stating: "When you met with President Mubarak in April, you said you wanted to pursue the 'same relationship of friendship and trust' that he had with your predecessor, Jacques Chirac".

"You called then for the 'reinforcement of bilateral relations in all areas.' This cooperation must be accompanied by new demands for the protection of human rights in Egypt. In particular, there is an urgent need to clearly and openly raise the problem of press freedom, as journalists are often arrested, threatened or attacked there."

The letter added: "The promise which President Mubarak himself made in 2004 to decriminalise press offences has not been kept. Only defaming civil servants has been decriminalized. Thirty-five press offences continue to be punishable by imprisonment, including publishing inaccurate reports, defaming the president or foreign heads of state, and undermining 'national institutions' such as the parliament and the army. Egypt does not hesitate to censor journalists' articles and websites, towards which President Mubarak displays a particularly disturbing authoritarianism."

The letter reminded President Sarkozy that Suleiman, better known by the pen name of "Kareem Amer," was arrested on 6 November 2006 for articles posted on his blog (<http://www.karam903.blogspot.com>) in which he criticised Egypt's leading religious institutions including the Sunni university of Al-Azhar, where he studied law. He was sentenced to three years in prison on 22 February for "inciting hatred of Islam" and insulting the president.

The press freedom organisation also voiced concern about the fate of Al-Munim, a journalist with the pro-Islamist biweekly Al-Shaab, the mouthpiece of Hizb al-Amal (the Labour Party), who was arrested by State Security Intelligence agents at his home in February 1993. He has been tried and acquitted twice – in 1993 in the so-called Talia al Fatah case (which got its name from a fundamentalist movement) and in February 1999 in the "Returnees from Albania" case. Nonetheless, he has never been released and the authorities have always refused to provide any information about him.

Source: [RSF](#)