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## MOHAMED FAHMY TALKS PRESS FREEDOM AFTER PRISON

November 11, 2015　|　Emily Haws　|



Mohamed Fahmy, a Canadian–Egyptian journalist who was recently freed from an Egyptian prison, was at Carleton on Nov. 9 to speak about his experiences and the importance of press freedom.

The event was hosted by CBC senior correspondent Neil Macdonald and presented by the Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom (CCWPF) and the School of Journalism, as well as other sponsors.

"[As journalists], to be branded as terrorists globally, and it's becoming a trend, is unacceptable," Fahmy said during the presentation. "At the end of the day, no journalist should be in prison."

Fahmy is an award-winning journalist who has worked for prominent news organizations such as CNN and *The New York Times*. His most recent post as the Egypt bureau chief for Al Jazeera English captured headlines around the world in Dec. 2013 when he was arrested on terrorism charges.

He was incarcerated for over 400 days for conspiring with the Muslim Brotherhood and fabricating news, allegations deemed false by most media experts and news organizations around the world.

Following an international outcry, Fahmy was pardoned by the Egyptian government and sent home in Sept. 2015.

Fahmy said that he believes he could have been released faster had former prime minister Stephen Harper and his cabinet had direct intervention in the case.

"When [former] Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird came to Egypt, he announced that my release was imminent . . . I was basically looking at which flight," Fahmy said during the presentation. "Suddenly my colleague was transferred back to Australia and it was a year before I was released. I was thrown back in the cage."

"I believe that [Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi] would not have resisted a call from Harper," Fahmy said.

Fahmy spoke about his experiences in prison, including what it was like to live in a wing that also houses members of ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Muslim Brotherhood. He also advised journalism students who want to cover Middle Eastern politics not to jump into a war zone.

"You can be the best journalist in the world, but if you don't have hostile environment training and the

skills to maneuver in a conflict zone, such as languages and experience, it can be much more difficult than what you anticipate," he said.

Shawn McCarthy, president of the CCWPF, said they brought Fahmy to speak in Ottawa because they had been advocating on behalf of him since he was captured. The organization awarded Fahmy the World Press Freedom Award in 2014.

"It's important for his voice to be heard around Parliament Hill, especially now with the new government coming to power," McCarthy said. "Hopefully what he had to say will carry some influence."

Susan Harada, associate director of the School of Journalism and Communication, said the event was an opportunity to discuss important issues, such as how a free press works in a democracy.

"Being able to host someone like Fahmy here really speaks to what the school of journalism is all about and what out Faculty of Public Affairs tries to promote—freedom of press and democracy and discussion of ideas," she said.

Proceeds from the night benefitted The Fahmy Foundation, which seeks to provide financial assistance and advocate for reporters and photographers who are unjustly imprisoned worldwide. However, Fahmy said the best part about being back in Canada were the little things.

"The best part of freedom is not being watched 24 hours a day, and not worrying about what you're going to say, write, and think," he said. "My wife and I are just very happy with the mundanity of going to the cinema or going to get ice cream and just walking around."