

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/egypt-australian-journalist-arrested-to-14-02-2012,41871.html>

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Middle East/North Africa - Egypt

Freed after frame-up

## Australian journalist arrested to silence coverage of key strike

14 February 2012

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Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn of the release yesterday of the Australian freelance journalist **Austin Mackell** two days after he was arrested.

He was detained in Mahalla, 120 km north of Cairo, with his translator Aliya Alwi, an American student, Derek Ludovici, and a trade unionist, Kamal Al-Fayyumi.

The two foreigners were immediately taken into custody, then released reportedly after a visit by the U.S. consul, whereupon they were escorted to Cairo pending a fuller investigation. The journalist's lawyer, Sayed Fathi, said his client was unlikely to be deported.

As we understand it, Mackell was covering the start of a general strike in Mahalla on 11 February, the first anniversary of the departure of former President Hosni Mubarak. Authorities accused him of inciting protests and paying workers to expand their strikes and demonstrations.

Mackell has been particularly interested in the labour unrest that has underpinned anti-government protests in Egypt. His articles and blog, "[The Moon under water](#)", which record the events of Egypt's revolution, have irritated the military leadership, which has yet to pass the baton to the newly-elected civilian politicians.

[Jess Hills](#), the Middle East correspondent of the Australian newspaper Global Mail, described the circumstances of Mackell's arrest on *ABC News*. She said the military rulers were nervous about the strikes that began a year ago.

The transitional military government, which has been running the country since Mubarak's fall, is fearful of the spread of labour unrest, while at the same time there is growing anger in the streets. This supports the argument that the journalist could have been framed by the authorities, anxious to stifle coverage of the popular discontent.

Reporters Without Borders deplores the arrest, despite the fact that the journalist was released. We condemn this trumped-up arrest which is an infringement of freedom of information and we recall that Egypt has fallen 39 places 166th in [the word press freedom index](#).

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