



ARTICLE 19

PRESS RELEASE

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**ARTICLE 19 Welcomes Alan Johnston's Release and Celebrates
Global Movement of Solidarity**

Alan Johnston was freed early this morning. ARTICLE 19 joins his family, his colleagues and friends at the BBC, other freedom of expression activists, and supporters around the world in celebrating his release after 114 days of captivity.

ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, Dr Agnès Callamard said: *"We are relieved that Alan Johnston's abduction and cruel detention is finally over and we rejoice with his family and friends in celebrating his return home. We also applaud the global movement of solidarity that responded to the inhumane actions of his abductors. From Beijing to London, across national borders, ideological divisions and religions, Alan Johnston's abductors united us all in a global condemnation of their despicable act."*

Nowhere was the campaign for Alan Johnston's release more insistent than in Palestine itself, where media organisations and civil society campaigned relentlessly for the release of their friend and courageous colleague. Palestinian journalists called on the Palestinian Authority in the strongest terms to exert all possible efforts to secure his release, picketing the Legislative Council with their mouths symbolically gagged and holding up banners calling for his release.

At the time of his abduction, Alan Johnston was the only Western journalist to remain in Gaza. His work and reports into the situation there played a critical role in strengthening global attention on, and understanding of, the plight of Palestinians. Silencing this voice for 114 days violated not only the human rights of Alan Johnston but also those of all Palestinians to have their stories heard internationally. The abduction constituted yet another chilling warning to all journalists and other witnesses in Gaza that their presence and work are no longer tolerated.

"On this day of celebration, we remember journalists and media workers who are still in captivity or hiding, for fear of their life, and those whose murders have gone unpunished." Alan Johnston came to symbolise the dangers faced by journalists reporting in areas of conflict. More than 100 journalists have lost their lives in the past six months. Iraq, once again, is the deadliest hotspot, accounting for 42 journalists and media workers killed this year alone, up from 28 at the same time last year.¹ No one will be brought to justice in the vast majority of these cases, creating a widespread climate of impunity.

"ARTICLE 19 joins many Palestinian civil society organisations in reaffirming the importance of the presence of foreign nationals and foreign journalists in Palestine and their vital role in exposing the range of abuses faced by Palestinians, and in calling for the perpetrators of Alan Johnston's abduction to be brought to justice." said Dr. Callamard.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Figures released last week by the International News Safety Institute (INSI).
2. For more information, please contact Hoda Rouhana, Middle East and North Africa Programme officer: hoda@article19.org , +44 20 7278 9214.
3. ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression.