



JAILED JOURNALIST
PETER GRETE

FREE AT LAST!

Jailed for doing his job, the Australian reporter is released after 400 days behind bars

As he had done for more than a year, Australian journalist Peter Grete woke in his shared concrete prison cell on Feb. 1 with the same question: how do I get out of here? Sentenced to seven years' prison in Egypt over what the government deemed "damaging" news reporting, Grete, 49, "woke up thinking very much about the campaign ahead of us," he told *Al Jazeera English*. But as he went for his regular morning jog within the jail grounds, the prison warden called him over and said something that could have been from his dreams minutes earlier: "He told me, 'It's time to pack your stuff,'" recalls Grete. "I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'You're going.' And I said, 'To another prison?' He said, 'No, no, no. The embassy's coming, they'll be here in an hour. Get your stuff and go.'"

It was a moment 402 days in the making. *Al Jazeera English* reporter Grete and two of his colleagues, Baher Mohammad and Mohamed Fadel Fahmy, were convicted in June last year of "spreading lies" to aid a terrorist organisation. Sydney-born Grete and Fahmy, a dual Canadian-Egyptian citizen, received seven-year sentences and Mohammad, an Egyptian, was handed a 10-year term. While Grete was deported and flew to Cyprus on Feb. 1, and Fahmy was due to be deported on the condition he renounce his Egyptian citizenship, Mohammad remained behind bars at press time. "Amidst all this relief, I still feel

a sense of concern and worry," said Grete on Feb. 2. "If it's appropriate for me to be free, it's right for all of them to be freed."

Meanwhile, Grete's parents are just thankful their son, whose first meal of freedom was pork and a beer in Cyprus with brother Mike, is making his way home. "I am ecstatic, I can't say how happy I am," said mother Lois in a press conference in Brisbane on Feb. 2. "I have dreamed about this day."

Grete's nightmare began in December 2013 when he and his colleagues were arrested in Cairo, accused of holding secret meetings with the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been declared a terrorist group. They were imprisoned until their June 2014 trial, when they were found guilty of aiding a terrorist organisation and reporting false news deemed damaging to post-revolution Egypt. Grete and his colleagues consistently denied the charges, insisting they were doing their jobs, as a "Free AJ Staff" social-media campaign swept the web. "The unique aspect in Peter's case is his complete innocence of the charges," Sydney barrister, Christopher Ward,

who represented Grete, tells WHO. "There was a sense of relief and satisfaction that it led to the correct outcome."

How it got to that point remained a mystery at press time. Grete was granted a retrial on Jan. 1, but was refused bail before his sudden release. "I guess we'll never know what the

"I have dreamed about this day"
—mother Lois Grete

turning point was to get him out," said his brother Andrew. "But obviously we are very grateful."

And they are now preparing a meal of "home-cooked prawns and beer" for the single Grete on his return to Queensland. "There will just be huge hugs," says Lois. "We'll try to keep him here for as long as possible."

They may not need to try too hard. Grete, who told *Al Jazeera* he was looking forward to watching "a few sunsets" and feeling the sand under his toes, called his release a "rebirth": "You realise that it's those little beautiful moments of life that are really precious. And spending time with my family. That is what is important."

■ By Michael Crooks. Reported by Louise Talbot



Grete's family in Brisbane (from left, father Juris, brother Andrew and mother Lois on Feb. 2) celebrated his release with champagne that had been in the fridge since Grete's June trial. "We expected he would be freed then," said Lois.

'DESPERATE FOR HOME'

Shortly after Peter Grete's sudden release from an Egyptian prison, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop spoke to the journalist. "He was immensely relieved and he was desperate to come home to Australia and reunite with his family," said Bishop, who had been in discussions with the Egyptian government over Grete's imprisonment. "From my discussion with him, he was very keen to be back on a beach and lying in the sun in Australia."

Bishop said Grete was given little notice before his release. "We moved as fast as we could to make arrangements for his immediate departure," said Bishop. "He will make his way home in his own time." In December, Bishop said she was "mildly optimistic" Grete would be released soon.

Bishop on Feb. 2.

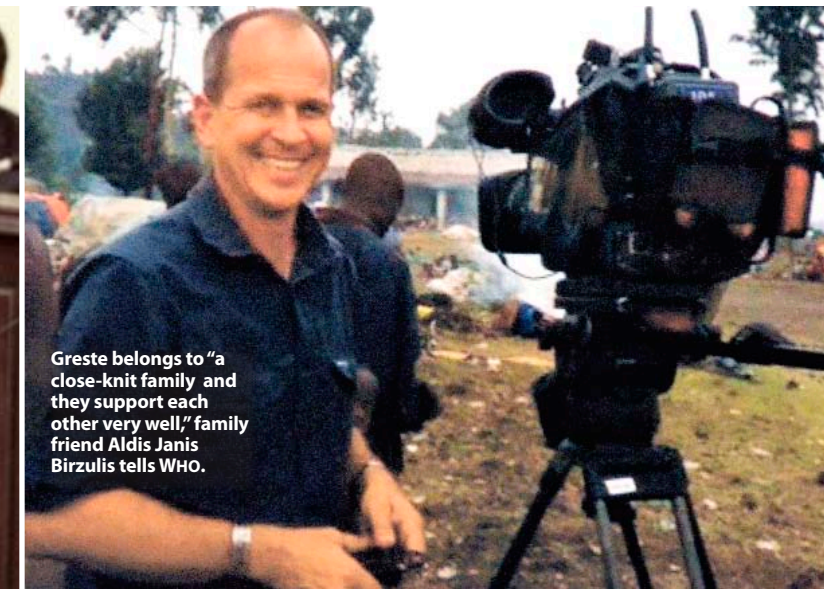


SURVIVING PRISON

"In prison the key is to stay fit physically, mentally and spiritually," said Grete (above, on the job; below, in an Egyptian court on June 23). "So I made a conscious effort to deal with all of those things. And hopefully I haven't come out of it too damaged."



Al Jazeera journalists (from left) Baher Mohammad, Mohamed Fadel Fahmy and Grete in an Egyptian court room on March 31 last year.



Grete belongs to "a close-knit family and they support each other very well," family friend Aldis Janis Birzulis tells WHO.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEFT: FACEBOOK.COM/FREEPETERGRETE; GETTY IMAGES (2); ACP; AAP