

The New York Times

620 EIGHTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10018

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To: Reporters Without Borders
From: Anne Barnard, New York Times Beirut Bureau Chief
RE: Mohammad Ghannam

Dear colleagues:

I am writing to ask for your urgent assistance in getting our colleague Mohammad Ghannam, a devoted and scrupulous Syrian-Palestinian journalist, out of Lebanon with a visa to a safe country. Here in Lebanon Mohammad faces imminent danger of detention or deportation to Syria, where he has been sentenced to eight years in prison for peaceful humanitarian work and citizen journalism. Given the conditions in Syrian prisons and the beatings and torture Mohammad suffered earlier during more than a year as a political prisoner, this is akin to a death sentence.

I have reviewed Mohammad's documents and can vouch for their authenticity and his veracity. The New York Times is eager to help Mohammad in any way it can, and has a record of doing so for employees in similar situations. We will still be in need of his professional services wherever he goes, at least for the medium term, and will make every possible effort to help him get settled.

Mohammad is an ideal candidate to support himself and contribute positively to any country where he may end up. He has a mechanical engineering degree and 15 years of professional experience in business, international news media organizations, and the United Nations refugee agency, as well as a long record of community development work and volunteerism. He has a strong commitment to the values of self-reliance, tolerance, democracy and dialogue.

In addition to his work with the Washington Post, National Public Radio, SouriaLi Radio and others, Mohammad has been a crucial member of my reporting team covering Syria and Lebanon since August 2013. He built very quickly on his experience as a citizen journalist, displaying his intellect, adaptability and energetic work ethic. He has successfully transitioned from advocate to rigorous and fair journalist covering all sides. His journalism work is one of the reasons that he is now at risk, and he is the kind of young journalist the world needs to support.

Mohammad speaks fluent English and Arabic, so an English-speaking country would be most promising for his relocation. He does not speak French. In addition to journalism, he could also find suitable work in NGOs, UN agencies, or other areas, and hopes to continue his education.

Mohammad has been in Lebanon on short-term residency permits. We have tried for months to get him longer-term residency, but conclude that authorities do not intend to give it. Amid fruitless processes and promises, his residency has now expired, exposing him to potential detention. Given the climate in Lebanon for Syrians especially Palestinians, this is alarming.

I trust you can help, and offer any cooperation I can provide to help Mohammad get somewhere where he can not only be safe but also, just as importantly, fully realize his great potential.

Best,



Anne Barnard