

WEDNESDAY, 7TH OCTOBER 2015

MOHAMMED RASOOL

IT HAS BEEN OVER ONE MONTH SINCE MOHAMMED RASOOL WAS ARRESTED AND IMPRISONED BY TURKISH POLICE ON CHARGES OF ASSISTING A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION.

FOLLOWING ARREST ON 27 AUGUST 2015, HIS VICE COLLEAGUES, PHILIP PENDLEBURY AND JAKE HANRAHAN WERE RELEASED BY TURKISH AUTHORITIES AFTER 11 DAYS BEHIND BARS, BUT RASOOL IS STILL BEING DETAINED. JAKE, PHIL AND RASOOL WERE DOCUMENTING CLASHES BETWEEN THE PKK YOUTH WING AND THE TURKISH AUTHORITIES IN CIZRE AND DIYARBAKIR IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THEIR ARREST.

VICE NEWS



ABOUT RASOOL

- 24 year old Mohammed Rasool is an accomplished freelance journalist who has worked as a translator and fixer for international news organizations, including the Associated Press and Al Jazeera.
- He is fluent in five languages, has an in-depth knowledge of the politics and culture of the region. Rasool is lauded by former colleagues as being a consummate professional, personable and fiercely intelligent.
- He is a graduate student who is studying a Masters in international relations at Fatih University in Istanbul (he was just a month away from completing his course and was considering a PhD next year).
- Rasool was born in Sulaymaniyah, a city in Iraqi Kurdistan.

LEGAL PROCESS

- Rasool's case is currently at the pre-trial, or investigation stage. He has been alternately accused of supporting ISIS and the PKK (notwithstanding that these groups oppose each other).
- Rasool is currently in a state of effective legal limbo: he is being held in pre-trial detention pending conclusion of an investigation: the Public Prosecutor has not yet made a decision whether to press charges (i.e. whether he will go to trial), having indicated that he wants to see the contents of an allegedly encrypted hard disk or file from Rasool's computer before making this decision.
- Rasool maintains that he does not hold incriminating encrypted data on his computer. The defence has not been allowed access to or further information on this allegedly encrypted file.

CHARGES

- Rasool has been charged with “knowingly and willingly helping an organized criminal group without being part of the hierarchical structure of the group” under the provisions of the Turkish Criminal Code Law Nr 5237, article 220(7), a provision increasingly being invoked against journalists, especially Kurds and those associated with the political left in Turkey.
- Those accused of terrorism-related offences like those Rasool is accused of, risk conviction without substantive and convincing evidence in ordinary courts.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

- Rasool's plight is unfortunately part of a wider pattern of crackdowns on media freedom in Turkey, and his case highlights the increasingly high risks borne by local journalists acting as “fixers” for international media correspondents.
- According to watchdog Freedom House, press freedom in Turkey has deteriorated significantly in the past five years, Turkey is considered “not free” with a press freedom score of 65/100 (0=best, 100=worst).
- Counter-terrorism legislation has increasingly been applied to curb criticism and close the space for free media and dissenting opinion of government. In addition to punitive measures applied under the law, the systematic political pressure from the executive branch has led to the firing of journalists and media workers for critical reporting on the Erdoğan government.
- The critical conditions within which members of the press work in Turkey, and the stark realities of their daily persecution, suggest that Rasool's chances of a fair trial are very slim.

¹“Why news as you know it wouldn't exist without ‘Fixers’”, <https://news.vice.com/article/why-local-freelancers-are-the-real-heroes-of-international-news>

² Free Rasool: VICE news staff on the journalist now imprisoned for a month in Turkey (27 September 2015), <https://news.vice.com/article/free-rasool-vice-news-staff-on-the-journalist-now-imprisoned-for-a-month-in-turkey>

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/turkey>

⁴ Amnesty International <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkey/report-turkey/>

⁵ Turkey also scored 24/30 for the legal environment, and, 27/40 for the political environment. Freedom Press 2015: Turkey, Freedom house, Amnesty International. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/turkey>

22 AUGUST 2015

Mohammed Rasool meets with VICE journalists Jake Hanrahan and Philip Pendlebury at Ataturk Airport in Istanbul. They travel to Mardin by Turksi Airlines where they are collected from the airport by a driver and driven to Cizre, Sirtak (3 hours drive from Mardin).

22-24 AUGUST 2015

MR, JH and PP film in Cizre and Silopi.

25 AUGUST 2015

MR, JH and PP arrive at Diyarbakir Hilton, film in Diyarbakir that night and the following night.

27 AUGUST 2015

After filming in Diyarbakir that evening, MR, JH, PP and their driver are arrested at their hotel (Diyarbakir Hilton) at midnight. 10-15 police officers were waiting for them at their hotel.

28 AUGUST 2015 (EARLY HOURS)

They are detained at the hotel for approximately 4 hours and their equipment and rushes are confiscated.

28-31 AUGUST 2015

Detained at the Diyarbakir Counterterrorism Branch. They were first given access to lawyers more than 24 hours after their arrest, on 29 August. Jake and Phil's translator could hardly speak English, however statements were still taken.

31 AUGUST 2015

Following a hearing, MR, JH and PP were remanded by the Diyarbakir Second Criminal Court of Peace in southeastern Diyarbakir province to an "Anti-Terror Prison" Diyarbakir D Type High Closed Prison.

1 SEPTEMBER 2015

MR, JH and PP were transferred to Kürkçüler Prison in Adana. The journey was 7 and a half hours with no water. They were held in a room that had blood all over the chairs and then taken to a room that was unbearably hot, where they were held overnight with no water until the following afternoon when they complained to the head guard and were taken to a better cell.

3 SEPTEMBER 2015

JH and PP released (although investigation still technically ongoing), and taken to an immigration detention centre where they were held for 3 days until their deportation to the UK.

6 SEPTEMBER 2015

JH and PP deported to the UK.

CURRENT

Rasool remains detained at Kürkçüler Prison in Adana whilst the authorities conclude their investigation and decide whether to press charges or not. The prosecution authorities have indicated that they wish to examine the contents of an allegedly encrypted file on Rasool's computer before making this decision. Rasool denies having any incriminating encrypted material on his computer.