

The Mansour case: not a one-off

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Two days in prison in the German capital: it doesn't sound all that bad, given the conditions facing prisoners in other parts of the world. But anyone who has seen the inside of the detention center in Berlin Moabit would be very unwilling to spend even an hour in one of its cells. I've spoken to people who were badly affected after spending just one day there. Don't be fooled by the smile on the face of Egyptian journalist Ahmed Mansour as he left the prison last Monday. The damage has been done.

The worst thing about it? Mansour's case is not a one-off. He was lucky that human rights organizations and his employer Al Jazeera started working on his behalf and calling for his release following his arrest on Saturday evening at Berlin Tegel airport. Others are not so fortunate. These cases often arise on the basis of arrest notices issued through Interpol. In June 2014 Muzaffer Acunbay, who had been granted political asylum in Switzerland – in part due to the fact that he had previously been subjected to torture – was arrested while on holidays in Greece, despite having made advance inquiries to ensure he would not be in danger. He was finally released by a Greek court on appeal in February 2015.

In an extensive report from November 2013, prominent British civil rights group Fair Trials International detail cases of abuse of the Interpol system by authoritarian states but also set out a range of proposals for improvements. A few months ago the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* also reported on the problem of political persecution carried out under the guise of transnational cooperation. One example of this is the case of Abdul Al-Mahouzi. The Bahraini human rights activist was apprehended at Frankfurt airport in July 2014 on the basis of an arrest warrant issued by his home state. Two weeks passed before he was finally released. The Interpol search notice was wholly unfounded; Al Mahouzi had long been acquitted by a court in Bahrain.

And so the Mansour case comes as no surprise to anyone who has been keeping an eye on the papers. Did the German police authorities and government officials not read the reports?

What's particularly troubling about the Mansour case is that Interpol refused to issue a request to arrest him but the German authorities proceeded regardless.

Neither the German Foreign Office nor the Justice Ministry has been able to adequately explain why this happened.

Extraditing the regime-critical journalist to Egypt would clearly have been out of the question – including under German law. As such, he should never have been arrested. When the arrest did take place the decision to release him should have been made as soon as possible and not after two days' wait.

Will anyone have to take responsibility for this mistake? It seems not, and this is part of the problem. The Justice Ministry and other relevant bodies need to act swiftly to introduce reforms and ensure that the Interpol system and its enforcement in Germany are in line with human rights standards.