

Tuesday 12 February 2019

Union movement celebrates Hakeem's release

The Australian union movement is celebrating the release of Professional Footballers Australia member Hakeem al-Araibi from a Thai prison where he has been held since November 27 last year.

The news broke Monday evening that the Thai Attorney-General requested the case to extradite Hakeem to his former home country of Bahrain be dropped.

Hakeem fled Bahrain after being imprisoned and tortured for taking part in pro-democracy protests in the gulf state. He was granted refugee status and permanent residency in Australia.

The Melbourne local was arrested on his honeymoon in Thailand last year.

The move to drop the extradition case follows a months-long campaign by football players, fans, civil society organisations and unionists for the return of the 25-year-old Pascoe Vale FC defender to his wife in Australia.

PFA member and former Socceroo Craig Foster led the campaign, travelling the world working tirelessly to free his fellow footballer.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"Like all Australians we are celebrating the return of Hakeem al-Araibi to his home, his wife and his club.

"Hakeem is an Australian union member who should never have been in prison.

"His union, Professional Footballers Australia, have been instrumental in securing his release. Their leadership and international partners – John Didulica, Francis Awaritefe and Brendan Schwab – deserve the highest praise for all their incredible work, and never giving up.

"Too many civil society groups, working people and passionate individuals to name gave this campaign everything. The Federal Government pressed his case on a diplomatic level.

"But the true heroes of this were ordinary people – football fans, players and union members – led by an extraordinary Australian, Craig Foster.

"I want to extend the thanks of all working people in our country to the Thai Attorney General for his action to secure Hakeem's freedom."

Quotes attributable to Professional Footballers Australia Chief Executive John Didulica:

"Today's outcome underlines the strength and force of the football community, its members and unionists at large."

"Foremost, the PFA expresses its everlasting gratitude to Craig Foster, whose depth of faith in human rights and sporting virtues was tested throughout this ordeal, but never wavered."

"More broadly, the football community, mobilised and inspired, showcased its most admirable qualities to the world; a sport, a community and a nation united to fight in the name of decency and altruism is a force to behold."

"The contribution of the ACTU to Hakeem's release was immense. Like many others throughout this process, their efforts were swift, compelling and fundamental to achieving the outcome that we celebrate today."

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