

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/israel-journalist-could-face-seven-year-30-05-2012,42702.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Israel

"Guilty" but spared jail Haaretz reporter reaches plea bargain with Tel Aviv district attorney

6 July 2012

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Reporters Without Borders has deep reservations about yesterday's announcement that a deal has been struck between the Tel Aviv district attorney and *Haaretz* reporter **Uri Blau** under which Blau will plead guilty to illegally possessing classified documents in exchange for a sentence of four months of community service.

"While we are relieved that Blau will avoid a prison sentence that could have been as much as seven years under article 113-c of the penal code, this plea bargain is highly questionable and we reiterate our call for the withdrawal of all the charges against Blau," Reporters Without Borders said.

"Four months of community service is obviously a much less severe sentence but it still constitutes a serious violation of media freedom and sends a warning to journalists. They now know they will be taking a risk if they base a story on confidential documents. At the same time, the excessive secrecy of the Israeli military and security apparatus makes proper reporting impossible without use of classified documents."

According to *Agence France Presse (AFP)*, Blau will plead guilty to "possession of secret information without intending to harm state security."

He received the classified documents, about illegal activity by the Israel Defence Forces in the Occupied Territories, from Anat Kamm, a young woman who was sentenced on 30 October 2011 to four and a half years in prison (plus 18 months suspended) for copying them while she was doing military service. Blau used them for story published on 4 December 2008

30.05.2012 : Journalist could face seven-year sentence for having secret documents

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Reporters Without Borders is highly disturbed by the Israeli attorney general's announcement that the *Haaretz* journalist **Uri Blau** will be indicted for "holding classified information without authorisation and without intention to harm the security of the state". He could face up to seven years' imprisonment under article 113-c of the criminal code.

"These proceedings, like the conviction of Anat Kam in October 2011, are a clear warning to all journalists who use confidential documents as the basis for their reporting," the press freedom organization said.

"It is a worrying sign for freedom of the press in Israel. We repeat our request for the charges against Uri Blau to be dropped.

The attorney general, Yehuda Weinstein, said in a statement: "Blau held, knowingly and without supervision, hundreds and thousands of documents classified as 'secret' and 'top secret,' which were stolen from the Central Command by the soldier Anat Kam, and he violated his obligation – and later his obligation before the state authorities – to stop holding them..."

In [a letter to the attorney general](#) on 3 November last year, Reporters Without Borders wrote: "Investigative journalists are the cornerstone of transparency, which is essential if a society is to function in a democratic manner. They provide a vital service. Convicting him would do grave harm to the free flow of news and information."

It also said: "In this case, the documents involved shed a vital light on the way the IDF was operating ... This is not about endangering the country's security. It is just a question of exercising one's right to information about a state entity."

During her military service between 2005 and 2007, Kam, an online journalist, photocopied classified military documents about abuses by Israeli forces in the Israeli-occupied territories and passed them on to Blau.

Beginning in late 2008, Blau used these documents as the basis for several articles for his newspaper Haaretz, all of which were approved by the military censors, as required by Israeli law. One of the articles, published in November 2008, said the IDF had violated a Supreme Court decision by carrying out targeted killings of Palestinian militants who could have been arrested.

Kam was [sentenced to four-and-a-half-years' imprisonment](#) on 30 October last year. She is currently in jail.

Photo: Tal Cohen

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