

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Government of the United Kingdom

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Dear Home Secretary

We, the undersigned organisations are writing to you to protest the detention of our colleague, the British journalist Martin Banks, by UK border guards in Calais under schedule 3 of the 2019 Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act.

Martin Banks was travelling to the UK with his family on Saturday 26 February 2022 when he was held for questioning for six hours, the maximum time granted under the counter terrorism act, while his wife and two daughters waited in the car.

Martin was questioned about his work as a professional journalist including a press trip he undertook to the Donbas in 2014 and his coverage of the UK's Covid-19 vaccine roll out.

He was obliged to hand over his passwords to his electronic equipment or face prosecution. He did not have the right to remain silent. He was released after the maximum six hours but his equipment, including a laptop and two mobile phones, were confiscated and not returned to him for another week.

The UK border guards thereby gained access to Martin's journalistic material and sources compromising the confidentiality of his sources and his work.

Martin Banks is a long standing member of the International Press Association, a board member of the Brussels Press Club, a member of the National Union of Journalists and is an accredited journalist with the EU institutions and Belgian authorities. He has been based in Brussels since 2001 where he has developed a reputation as a professional and ethical journalist working with reputable publications for over 40 years.

We are deeply disturbed by the decision of the UK Border Guards to detain him under the counter terrorism act and to use that time to question him about his journalistic work. It is our belief that the border guards have abused their powers, resulting in the intimidation of a journalist and implying that his journalistic work is an indicator of terrorist intent.

The confiscation of his equipment furthermore is a direct breach of journalists' rights to protect their sources a fundamental principle of media freedom.

Martin Banks has since made a formal complaint to the UK Border Force and raised the matter with the UK Embassy to Belgium and the UK mission to the EU but has, so far, had no satisfactory response.

He in particular seeks guarantees that he will not be subjected to detentions in future visits to the UK.

Our organisations represent journalists across Europe including many British journalists based outside the UK and are deeply concerned that our members are at risk of repeating the experience that Martin Banks was subjected to.

The UK government has a strong reputation for promoting journalists' rights and media freedoms globally and was the joint initiator, with Canada, for establishing the Media Freedom Coalition in July 2019 to promote media freedoms around the world. We are therefore confident that the government will wish to resolve this issue as quickly as possible.

We ask you, as Home Secretary, to investigate the actions of the border guards and the reasons for their detention of a journalist. We ask you to remind the UK border guards that journalism and critical journalism is not evidence of terrorism. And we ask you for your assurances that journalists will never again be subjected to this form of arbitrary detention.

Kind Regards,

International Press Association (API – IPA)
International Press Institute (IPI)
International Federation of Journalists
National Union of Journalists of Great Britain and Ireland
Brussels Press Club