

Al-Jazeera Sacks Yvonne Ridley, 19 Nov. 2003

Source: *Kavkaz Center*

Sister Yvonne Ridley, a senior editor with Aljazeera's newly launched English website in Doha, Qatar, has been sacked by her Gulf bosses. The journalist, who rose to international fame in September 2001 when she was captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan, joined the website [Aljazeera] in July.



Last night Sister Yvonne said she was bewildered and hurt but until she had written confirmation of being fired and the reasons why, she was unable to comment further.

In the last two years Yvonne has become an international peace campaigner and anti-war activist sharing platform with high profile personalities including the Rev. Jesse Jackson, British politicians George Galloway and Tony Benn, Palestinian activist Leila Khaled, and Ahmed Ben Bella, former Algerian President and revolutionary leader.

Her anti-Bush views are universally known and there are fears among colleagues that her vocal criticisms of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan may have led to her demise. Exclusive stories and pictures revealing US soldiers searching and tying up Iraqi and Afghani children have been condemned by the US Central Command. 'It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Ridley's revealing stories have led to her downfall. The site has already pulled two anti-American caricatures after managers received pressure from the Americans,' said one source close to Aljazeera.

The man responsible for sacking Sister Yvonne is Abdulaziz Ibrahim Al-Mahmoud who issued the order but did not have the guts to confront her with it, instead he sent his secretary to deliver the news to Sister Yvonne's home in Doha.

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The man responsible for sacking Sister Yvonne is Abdulaziz Ibrahim Al-Mahmoud who issued the order but did not have the guts to confront her with it, instead he sent his secretary to deliver the news to Sister Yvonne's home in Doha. Al-Mahmoud is not a big fan of hers after she derided him for shopping in Marks and Spencer during a recent trip to London with his eager-to-please sidekick Ahmed Sheikh. Marks and Spencer is the famous Israel-supporting shop which is boycotted by many Muslims in the UK!

In recent weeks Al Mahmoud has escorted two parties from the US embassy around the offices of Aljazeera, giving Sister Yvonne's work station a wide berth because of its anti-war and anti Bush messages as well as a Palestinian flag situated there prominently!

The regime in Saudi Arabia has also not escaped Sister Yvonne's attention - something not lost on Al-Mahmoud who was refused entry to the Kingdom recently.

Yvonne Ridley was a journalist of the famous Londoner Mirror newspaper. She was captured by the Taliban when she went undercover into the country wearing the all-enveloping burqa dress of an Afghan woman. She was detected and was held for 10 days before being released on humanitarian grounds on the orders of Mulla Umar. Her outspoken views are well-known, especially those praising and supporting Palestinian martyrdom operations. She has endeared herself to the Muslim world and is a recent convert to Islam. Sister Yvonne has devoted much of her spare time and energy to helping brothers and sisters around the world.

Now it is OUR turn to stand staunchly by her side. At least we should demand answers from Aljazeera as to why she was sacked.

What you can do...

Email: Mr. Jihad Ballout, the spokesman for Aljazeera on jballout@aljazeera.net, with your questions.

cc: copy to the Al-Mahmoud, chief editor on chiefnet@aljazeera.net

cc: to ahmedsh@aljazeera.net

The Muslim International Newsletter from Dr. Amir Ali -- amirali@ilaam.net

Al-Jazeera's English Service Stunned by Ridley Firing

Source: Jihad Unspun

Nov 19, 2003

By Iason Athanasiadis



High-profile British journalist Yvonne Ridley appears to have been fired as a result of her campaigning to increase journalists' rights at Al-Jazeera Net.

Ridley is the last of nine journalists to leave the struggling news website in as many months. Her departure is raising questions over whether the experiment in producing Al-Jazeera news in English will be successful.

"Nobody's sure of what to expect anymore," one Al-Jazeera Net journalist told the Daily Star. "We literally fell back nine steps in progress with the sacking of Yvonne."

Al-Jazeera Net management offered their staff permanent contracts some days before Ridley's firing in a move that some have interpreted as a bid to lessen the dismay felt at Ridley's sacking.

Some journalists continue to be on trial ten months after they arrived in Qatar. Al-Jazeera's trial period is three months.

"They (the management) said that they will shut the site down and I think they're waiting to see how many people will sign on to their contracts (before deciding)," a source said.

The move to dismiss Ridley came just four months after she joined the Doha-based news operation. Far from being merely a prestige signing, Muslim convert Ridley seemed an ideal choice for Al-Jazeera Net's managers. She has

written several prominent articles on the website and campaigned tirelessly for the release of arrested Al-Jazeera journalist Tayseer Alouni.

Ridley achieved international notoriety following her detention by the Taliban in the days prior to the bombing of Afghanistan. Her subsequent conversion to Islam and move to Al-Jazeera caused media sensations in the UK.

"Until I know why I've been fired, or given written notice, I can't say anything other than that I'm completely devastated and puzzled," Ridley told the Daily Star from Doha.

Ridley's dismissal is said to be a manifestation of the wider struggle between foreign journalists and local management over work rights. In particular, Ridley campaigned hard to extend the National Union of Journalists to Aljazeera. She opened the first NUJ branch in the Middle East and subscribed most journalists to it. Before her arrival, journalists on the news site often worked twelve-hour shifts, six days a week, without overtime pay or time off. Staff applying to the management for exit visas to visit nearby Dubai on their weekends, were often refused them.

Ridley's colleagues note that she had public rows in the newsroom with the Arab management. In one case, she clashed with an Arabic site manager after he put up a notice on the office bulletin-board, advertising a men-only editorial meeting.

"They all brought food and had a little party in there," a source said. "When Yvonne asked him what they had talked about, the manager told her sarcastically that it was about sex-discrimination issues."

Al-Jazeera press spokesman Jihad Ballout said that Ridley was dismissed because she "just didn't see eye-to-eye" with site managers. Ballout rejected speculation that the website will be affected by her going.

"She (Ridley) hasn't received official confirmation," he said. "She hasn't been served with her official papers."

Commenting on the high number of employees to have walked away from the site, Ballout said that a high "turnover of employees in a newly-set up operation is not that surprising, especially in an operation that is so young."

A senior member of management told the Daily Star that, far from “scaling down operations, its business as usual. Nothing will change. In fact, more people are being hired.”

Asked where the new recruits are to be hired from, he replied “Wherever. Wherever we can get them from” and promised increased rights.

The management source insisted that “we’ll improve the working conditions, things will be much better than before. Within a year we’ll expand.”

Aljazeera’s English-language service was initially launched in the first days of the US-led invasion of Iraq. The site, according to former editor Joanne Tucker, was meant to reach out to “the global audience we know from feedback that exist and that seem to be thirsty, and demanding an insider, independent perspective on this part of the world.”

In July, Tucker was reassigned to a non-managerial position in Al-Jazeera by a management frustrated at delays in launching the site. When contacted for this article, she refused to comment on the future of the website.

“All that talk about bridging cultural gaps has turned out false and the managers here are interested in having docile Filipino and Indian workers,” one staff-member said.

Al-Jazeera has already capitulated to US pressure several times in recent months.

It parted ways with its director after the war in Iraq and appointed new manager Waddah Khanfar – one of a few Arab journalists to have interviewed US Administrator in Iraq Paul Bremer. Khanfar was also charged with improving relations between Al-Jazeera’s bureau in Baghdad and US occupation authorities following the killing of an Al-Jazeera correspondent by the US Army.

In September, Aljazeera pulled a caricature on the second commemoration of the World Trade Centre bombing from its website after an outraged White House reportedly woke up the Emir of Qatar to protest. The cartoon featured an image of the twin towers crumbling to be replaced by two petrol dispensers.



“Those twin gasoline pumps would have triggered death threats here in the US, to say the least,” said an editor on the Wall Street Journal, “but I don’t agree with any news organization bowing to the preferences of any sovereign state, including my own government. Money talks, and it can corrupt. I’m not implying that Washington is doing anything illegal, simply that it is acting like a very powerful lobbyist and throwing its weight around.”

Sources at Aljazeera say that this week will be crucial in deciding the future of the website. Any decisions taken are bound to impact on the English-language Al-Jazeera channel that was slated to begin broadcast in early 2004 but is said to have been pushed back.

“That’s certainly on track,” Ballout said. “Both the documentary channel and English-language service will be launched. I don’t know when exactly, but the annex to the existing building is being worked on to house people and equipment for the channels.”

Aljazeera Net is currently advertising job vacancies on english.aljazeera.net.

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<http://majdur.htmlplanet.com>