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Al Jazeera America Digital Journalists Organize with NewsGuild of NY

Overwhelming Majority of Newsroom Joins Effort to Unionize

NEW YORK – Citing a deep commitment to Al Jazeera America’s mission of providing quality, cutting-edge journalism, and a desire for more consistent and transparent management practices, the digital newsroom of Al Jazeera America announced today that it has petitioned for representation with The NewsGuild of New York, CWA Local 31003. An overwhelming majority of the digital newsroom has signed on to the effort, and the group has called on AJAM’s management to voluntarily recognize their union. They are still awaiting a formal response from the company.

Should Al Jazeera refuse to do so, it would be the first journalism outlet in recent months to be forced into a federally supervised election at the National Labor Relations Board.

Along with their request for voluntary recognition, the AJAM digital employees presented management with a mission statement in which they asserted that representation by the Guild, with its long history as an advocate for journalists at respected news organizations, would not only improve their workplace, but their ability to continue to practice quality journalism.

“We’re excited,” said Ned Resnikoff, Digital Reporter. “We believe in Al Jazeera’s goal of delivering captivating, groundbreaking news, and the newsroom is really coming together to help the company further its journalistic mission. We welcome a constructive, amicable discussion with management to jointly address our concerns.”

"By organizing, we’ve had the chance to more fully realize the value and excellence of our newsroom — something we're all committed to improving," said Caroline Preston, Digital Editor.
"We’re excited to welcome the digital staff at Al Jazeera America to the Guild” said Peter Szekely, President of The NewsGuild of New York. “For more than 80 years, the Guild has helped thousands of journalists and media workers translate their workplace concerns into real life solutions. We’re ready to apply that knowledge and experience to our newest members at Al Jazeera America."

Full text of mission statement:

“All of us at Al Jazeera America believe in a shared mission: delivering quality, cutting-edge journalism; going deeper; and amplifying the voice of the voiceless. We are proud to have helped build a vibrant and essential piece of one of the most respected media networks in the world.

Across our industry, journalists at some of the web’s premier media establishments are choosing union representation. And now, the employees of Al Jazeera America Digital are joining them.

We want to work with Al Jazeera management in a spirit of honesty, integrity and transparency — both to produce the news and to improve the workplace in which we produce it.

We who are tasked with communicating the voice of the voiceless must retain a voice ourselves. The smart, creative, award-winning people who commit to this mission need to work in an environment that respects their efforts. We want our newsroom to exemplify the best practices of a modern, humane workplace that values diversity, equality and fairness.

As we enter our third year in the public eye, a troubling lack of transparency, inconsistent management and lack of clear redress have persisted at AJAM Digital. Discrepancies in salaries, responsibilities and the way job performance is evaluated undermine our work and the harmony of our workplace.

We believe Al Jazeera America can do better. We call upon Al Jazeera's leaders to uphold its mission, not just to its audience but also to its employees.

By addressing institutional issues collectively, we can better resolve problems when they arise, do our jobs with dignity and achieve a measure of security that fosters world-class journalism.

That is why we are forming a union with The NewsGuild of New York, part of the Communications Workers of America. It has a long history of representing journalists, including digital journalists at The New York Times, Reuters, The Daily Beast and elsewhere.

We ask that Al Jazeera management recognize our choice and enter into a constructive, amicable collective bargaining process with us.”

About NewsGuild of New York
The NewsGuild of New York, Local 31003 of the Communications Workers of America, represents about 2,800 journalists and other employees, mostly at New York area-based news organizations, including The New York Times, Thomson Reuters and The Daily Beast. It was launched in 1934 by a group of journalists that included crusading columnist Heywood Broun.

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