

Letters

I promise not to be silent when I ought to speak

When I joined a Rostrum public speaking club back in the 1970s, I was required to learn the organisation's promise. Now, 40 years on, the words, learned by rote, still flow: *"I promise to submit myself to the discipline of this Rostrum Club, and to endeavour to advance its ideals and enrich its fellowship. I will defend freedom of speech in the community, and will try at all times to think truly and to speak clearly. I promise not to be silent when I ought to speak."*

Whether you belong to an organisation such as Rostrum or not, most Australians cherish the right to free speech and expression of thought. Granted, the media, in all its forms, traditional and modern, provide the community with the opportunity "not to be silent".

Despite the criticism levelled from time to time against journalists, they too have a role to play in not only reporting the news but also offering commentary.

The role of the foreign correspondent can be dangerous, not just from armed conflict but also questionable judicial processes.

The high-profile case involving Australian Peter Greste brings into sharp focus the way some jurisdictions view reporting, especially in a time of civil upheaval. The domestic and international reaction to the sentences handed down on Monday in Cairo is a clear indication that the defence of freedom of speech in the community calls on each of us not to be silent when we ought to speak.

Allan Gibson
Cherrybrook, NSW