

# URGENT ACTION

## QATARI ACTIVISTS GRANTED VISIT FROM FAMILIES

**Two Qatari activists who have been held incommunicado since 22 March were allowed a visit by family members yesterday. They are said to be in solitary confinement in the central police headquarters in the capital, Doha. They remain at risk of ill-treatment.**

**Muhammad Issa al-Baker** and **Mansour bin Rashed al-Matroushi** remain in solitary confinement in the central police headquarters in Doha, Qatar, five days after their arrest. For four days they were held incommunicado until the authorities called family members on 26 March and told them they could visit the activists within the following four hours. However, the two men have not been allowed to make phone contact with the outside world, to speak for instance to their lawyers, and are unclear when they will next be permitted family visits. They have complained of poor detention conditions such as irregular meals, cold rooms, and no access to an outside space. They were told without further clarification that their detention without charge could go on for at least another 10 days.

Although the Qatari authorities have declared that there was a warrant for the two men's arrests, both of them deny being told about a warrant before or at the time of their arrest. The arrest seems to have been prompted by a letter written by a large number of activists, which was delivered by the two men to the French embassy. According to the authorities, the letter, dated 3 March 2013, contains threats against the French embassy and citizens that should France go ahead with its military intervention in Mali. However, according to the activists it was merely a protest letter warning the French authorities that a military intervention in Mali would increase hatred and violence.

Muhammad Issa al-Baker and Mansour bin Rashed al-Matroushi were returning from a family trip to Mesaieed (also written as Umm Said), 40km south of Doha, when they were stopped at a checkpoint manned by plain-clothes security force personnel. They were taken to Doha's central police headquarters. The police acknowledged to the men's family that they were detaining them, but did not provide reasons for doing so. They told family members they did not make the arrests, raising the question of whether the intelligence agency State Security, who often use plain-clothes officers, did so. One of the men's lawyers visited the State Security Prosecutor on 27 March and was told that no criminal charges had yet been brought against the two men.

### **Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:**

- Urging the authorities to disclose the reasons for the arrest of Muhammad Issa al-Baker and Mansour bin Rashed al-Matroushi, and to ensure that they are protected from ill-treatment and given, without delay, regular access to their families, lawyers of their own choosing and any medical attention they may require;
- Calling for the two men to be released without delay unless they are charged with an internationally recognizable crime and promptly tried in proceedings which fully comply with international fair trial standards.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 MAY 2013 TO:**

Minister of Interior  
 Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Thani  
 Ministry of the Interior  
 PO Box 920  
 Doha, State of Qatar  
 Fax: +974 4432 2927  
 Email: info@moi.gov.qa  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Attorney General  
 Dr Ali bin Fetais Al Marri  
 PO Box 705  
 Doha, State of Qatar  
 Fax: +974 4484 3211  
 Email: info@pp.gov.qa  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**  
Head of state (Amir of Qatar)  
 Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani  
 PO Box 923  
 Doha, State of Qatar  
 Fax: +974 4436 1212

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 71/13. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE22/005/2013>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Freedom of expression is strictly controlled in Qatar, and the press often exercises self-censorship. The right to freedom of expression is further threatened by the 2004 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, whose provisions risk criminalizing legitimate activities. The Qatari government acceded to this convention in May 2008.

Since 2011, the State Security, which runs its own detention facilities, has detained a number of people, some of them for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. Most of those detained by State Security have reported torture and other ill-treatment during periods of detention prior to charge or trial, particularly during periods of incommunicado detention.

Qatari poet Mohammed al-Ajami (also known as Mohammed Ibn al-Dheeb) was arrested by State Security on 16 November 2011 in Doha, and charged with “inciting to overthrow the ruling system” and “insulting the Amir”. He had presented himself to State Security when summoned, and immediately been arrested. He was detained incommunicado for months before he was allowed family visits. Local activists believe that the real reason for his arrest was his 2011 work “the Jasmine Poem”, which he wrote during the wave of protests throughout the Arab world that began in December 2010. The poem criticized Gulf states and reads: “we are all Tunisia in the face of the repressive elite”. In November 2012, the Criminal Court in Doha sentenced him to life in prison. Some observers were not allowed to enter the court, and Mohammed al-Ajami himself was not present at the sentencing. On 25 February 2013, the Court of Appeal in Doha reduced his sentence to 15 years’ imprisonment.

Names: Muhammad Issa al-Baker, Mansour bin Rashed al-Matroushi  
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 71/13 Index: MDE 22/006/2013 Issue Date: 27 March 2013