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## **Libyan writer detained following protest call**

A Libyan writer and political commentator arrested last week and accused of a driving offence appears to have been targeted for calling for peaceful protests in the country, Amnesty International has said.

Jamal al-Hajji, a former prisoner of conscience who has dual Libyan and Danish nationality, was detained on 1 February in Tripoli by plain clothes security officers. They accused him of hitting a man with his car, which he denies.

Jamal al-Hajji's arrest came shortly after he made a call on the internet for demonstrations to be held in support of greater freedoms in Libya, in the manner of recent mass protests in Tunisia, Egypt and other states across the Middle East and North Africa.

"Two particular aspects of the case lead us to believe that the alleged car incident was not the real reason for Jamal al-Hajji's arrest, but merely a pretext to conceal what was really a politically motivated arrest," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"First, eyewitnesses have reported that the man who is said to have complained of being struck by Jamal al-Hajji's car showed no visible signs of injury."

"Secondly, the officers who conducted the arrest were in plain clothes, indicating that they were not the ordinary police who generally would be expected to handle car accidents, but members of the Internal Security Agency (ISA). It is the ISA that usually carries out arrests of political suspects and they wear plain clothes."

Jamal al-Hajji was arrested in a car park in Tripoli by a group of about 10 security officials in plain-clothes who told him a man claimed to have been hit by Jamal al-Hajji's car, which he had just parked.

On 3 February, Jamal al-Hajji appeared before the General Prosecutor in Tripoli and was charged with injuring a person with his car. His detention was extended for six days and he was transferred to Jdaida Prison.

"The Libyan authorities must clarify the legal status of Jamal al-Hajji," said Malcolm Smart.

They must release him immediately and without conditions if the real reason for his continuing detention is his peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression, in which case he is a prisoner of conscience."

An accountant by profession, Jamal al-Hajji has written a series of articles about political developments and human rights in Libya, mostly published on news websites based outside the country.

He is a former prisoner of conscience. He was recently detained for over four months, accused of "contempt of judicial authorities", after he complained to the Libyan authorities that he had been ill-

treated while imprisoned for two years up to March 2009.

Since his release on 14 April 2010, he has continued to call for greater freedoms in Libya.

## **Background**

The Libyan government maintains tight curbs on freedom of expression and the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Law No. 71 of 1972 on the Criminalization of Parties bans any form of group activity that is based on a political ideology deemed contrary to the principles of the al-Fateh Revolution of 1 September 1969, which brought Libyan leader Mu' ammar al-Gaddafi to power more than 40 years ago.

Various provisions of the Libyan Penal Code severely limit freedom of expression and have been used against those who express dissent or are deemed to be critics or opponents of the current political system.