

URGENT ACTION

PROTESTORS RELEASED; OTHERS STILL DETAINED

Nine people among 15 that were arrested while holding a peaceful protest in Muscat, the capital of Oman, have been released. Six are still believed to be detained. Their whereabouts are unknown. They are believed to be held incommunicado and are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

The 15 individuals were among a larger group of people who held a peaceful protest in People's Square in front of the Shura Council, in Muscat, on 14 May. Omani security forces are reported to have surrounded the area where the protesters were assembled. The security forces closed the roads and ordered the demonstrators to disperse within 10 minutes; some did so, but others refused to disperse and were then arrested.

Prominent female lawyer **Basma al-Kiyumi**, the only woman who was among those arrested, was released on 16 May. She was charged in connection with participating in an unlawful gathering and released on bail to await trial at a future date. On 17 May, some eight other activists were released, among them **Muhammad al-Habssi** and **Ibrahim Sa'id al-Hajri**. It is not known where the remaining six – including **Nabhan al-Hanashi** – are being detained or if any charges have been brought against them.

The protesters were calling for the release of other people who were arrested while carrying out protests on 12 May in Muscat and in the cities of Salalah and Sur.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to disclose the whereabouts of the remaining six arrested in connection with recent protests and to ensure that they are protected from torture or other ill-treatment and given immediate access to their families, lawyers and any medical attention they need;
- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of those still detained if they are being held solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Asking for details of any charges they face to be made public and calling on the authorities to ensure that any legal proceedings against them conform to international fair trial standards;
- Calling on the authorities to make public the names of all those arrested recently and to uphold and protect the right to peaceful protest.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 JULY 2011 TO:

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id
Head of State, Prime Minister, Foreign
Affairs, Defence and Finance Minister
Diwan of the Royal Court
The Palace
Muscat 113
Sultanate of Oman
Fax: +968 24 735 375
Salutation: Your Majesty

His Excellency Sayid Hamoud bin
Faisal bin Said Al Busaidi
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of Interior
PO Box 127
Ruwi 112
Muscat
Sultanate of Oman
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Riyami
Chairman
National Human Rights Commission
P.O.Box 29, Postal Code: 103
Bareq A' Shati
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Fax: +968 24648801
Email: enquiry@nhrc.om
Salutation: Dear Mohammed bin
Abdullah Al Riyami

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 142/11. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde20/003/2011>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Omani security forces appear to have used excessive force against peaceful and other protestors on a number of occasions since protestors calling for political and other reform took to the streets earlier this year. At least three protestors have been killed and dozens have been injured as a result of the security forces firing weapons at demonstrations. Many others have been arrested for their involvement in protests.

Following protests on 27 February, Oman's head of state Sultan Qaboos ordered the creation of 50,000 jobs and 150 Omani riyals a month (approximately US\$390) in benefits for the unemployed, in response to protestors' demands. On 7 March, Sultan Qaboos made a wide-ranging reshuffle and restructuring of the cabinet, sacking a number of ministers.

However, protestors have continued intermittently to call for the sacking of other ministers, including the Minister of Information. They have also called for several current and former ministers, such as the former Minister of the Royal Office, to be held to account for offences they are alleged to have committed while in office. In addition, they are voicing the need for greater freedom of the press and for the reforms that Sultan Qaboos ordered in February and March to be implemented.

The Omani authorities continue to maintain strict restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. Several bloggers and journalists have been targeted in recent years after criticizing the government, including some who have been detained.

Further information on UA: 142/11 Index: MDE 20/004/2011 Issue Date: 20 May 2011

