

URGENT ACTION

QATARI POET ON TRIAL

Qatari poet Mohammed al-Ajami has been detained since November 2011 and is currently on trial for reportedly “inciting to overthrow the ruling regime” and “insulting the Amir” in relation to his poems. There are concerns that the charges may be solely in relation to the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. If so, he would be considered a prisoner of conscience.

Poet **Mohammed al-Ajami** – also known as Mohammed Ibn al-Dheeb – was arrested on 16 November 2011 in Doha, the Qatari capital, and later reportedly charged with “inciting to overthrow the ruling system” and “insulting the Amir”. He was arrested by state security after he reported to them after having been summoned to do so. He was allegedly detained incommunicado for months before he was finally allowed family visits. He is believed to currently be detained in Central Prison in Doha.

According to information received by Amnesty International, the prosecution is reported to have brought the charges in relation to a poem he wrote in 2010 in which he criticised the Amir. However, activists in the Gulf region believe that the real reason for his arrest relates to a poem he wrote in 2011 entitled “the Jasmine Poem” which was written in the context of the Arab Spring. The poem criticized Gulf States and stated that “we are all Tunisia in the face of the repressive elite”.

His trial, which began in November 2011 at the Criminal Court in Doha, is said to be marred with irregularities. The court sessions are reportedly held in secret. Furthermore, according to information received by Amnesty International, his lawyer was not allowed to attend one of the court sessions and had to provide his defence in writing only.

The charge of “inciting to overthrow the ruling regime” carries a maximum sentence of death (Article 130 of the Penal Code) and up to five years’ imprisonment for “insulting the Amir” (Article 134 of the Penal Code).

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

- Urging the authorities to immediately release Mohammed al-Ajami if he has been detained solely in relation to the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, in which case he is a prisoner of conscience;
- Calling on them to drop all charges relating solely to the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and ensure that Mohammed al-Ajami’s trial is in accordance with international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 DECEMBER 2012 TO:

Minister of the Interior

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalid Al Thani
Ministry of the Interior
PO Box 920
Doha, State of Qatar
Fax: + 974 4444 4945 (keep trying)
Email: info@moi.gov.qa
Salutation: His Excellency

Amir of the State of Qatar

Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani
PO Box 923
Doha, State of Qatar
Fax: + 974 4436 1212
Salutation: Your Highness

And copies to:

Attorney General

Dr Ali bin Fetais Al Marri
PO Box 705
Doha, State of Qatar
Fax: +974 4484 3211
Salutation: Dr Ali bin Fetais Al Marri

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Freedom of expression – including press freedoms – is strictly controlled in Qatar, in addition to which the press often exercises self-censorship.

The right to freedom of expression in Qatar is further threatened by the accession by the government in May 2008 to the 2004 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, the provisions of which risk criminalizing legitimate activities.

The rights to freedom of expression and assembly are guaranteed under international human rights law and standards. Where restrictions are imposed they must be for certain specific purposes, which include the rights and reputation of others, and must be demonstrably necessary and proportionate and must not put in jeopardy the right itself. Public figures of authority should tolerate a greater degree of criticism, not less, than people generally; accordingly, criminal or other laws that provide special protection against criticism for public officials are not consistent with respect for freedom of expression.

Name: Mohammed al-Ajami
Gender m/f: M

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