

URGENT ACTION

FEMALE ACTIVIST DETAINED INCOMMUNICADO

Zahra Salih, an activist in the Southern Movement in Yemen, has been held incommunicado since 8 November. She is at risk of being tortured or suffering other ill-treatment. Amnesty International is concerned that she may be held solely for the peaceful expression of her right to freedom of expression and assembly, and therefore may be a prisoner of conscience.

Zahra Salih, aged 39, was arrested by security force members on 8 November in Aden, southern Yemen, while she was in a car on her way to a hotel. She has since been detained without access to a lawyer or her family. She is believed to be held at the Criminal Investigation Unit in Aden.

According to information received by Amnesty International from sources in Yemen, members of the security forces went to her house just before midnight on 7 November to arrest her, but her family told them that she was not at home and refused to allow them to search the house without a warrant. Her father was arrested in the morning of 8 November and was released after a couple of hours. At around 10am the same day, the security forces searched the house but could not find her. She was arrested at around 6.30pm on 8 November when the security forces stopped a car she was travelling in. It is not clear why she was arrested, but sources in Yemen say they believe she has been targeted for being an active and outspoken member of the Southern Movement and for her participation in protests.

She was previously detained for two days in October 2009 in connection with protests in the south of Yemen. The Southern Movement is a coalition of political groups that emerged out of protests that began in 2007 and is seen by the Yemeni government as calling for the independence of the southern part of the country.

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

- Urging the authorities to ensure that Zahra Salih is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and is allowed prompt and regular access to lawyers of her choosing, her family and any medical treatment she may require;
- Calling on the authorities to disclose any charges that have been brought against her and to ensure that any legal proceedings against her conform to international fair trial standards;
- Expressing concern that she may be held solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of assembly and noting that, if this is the case, Amnesty International would consider her a prisoner of conscience and call for her immediate and unconditional release.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 JANUARY 2011 TO:

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Mutaheer Rashad al-Masri
Ministry of Interior
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 332 511 /
+967 1 514 532 / +967 1 331 899
Email: moi@yemen.net.ye
Salutation: Your Excellency

President

His Excellency Ali Abdullah Saleh
Office of the President of the Republic
of Yemen
Sana'a
Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 274 147
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Human Rights

Her Excellency Dr Huda Ali Abdullatef Alban
Ministry for Human Rights
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 444 838 /
+967 1 419 555 / +967 1 419 700
Email: mshr@y.net.ye
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Protests in the south of Yemen have been taking place sporadically for about three years. They began with protests by retired soldiers from the south, who have increasingly been complaining that they do not receive the same treatment in employment, salary and pensions as soldiers from the north of the country. Most of the retired soldiers are from the army of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), commonly known as South Yemen. Following the unification of the country in 1990, the armies of both the PDRY and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), commonly known as North Yemen, were merged into a single army for the new Republic of Yemen. However, after the civil war in 1994, which ended in the defeat of the South, many of the soldiers of the former PDRY were dismissed from the army. They, as well as those who remained in the current unified army, allege that they are subject to discrimination compared to soldiers originally from the army of the YAR. The Southern Movement appears to have emerged following these protests as well as being sparked by the general discrimination that the people in the south believe they face.

The Southern Movement has organized a number of protests over what it perceives to be the government's failure to address discrimination against people from the south of the country. The government's response to these protests has been heavy-handed. Dozens of demonstrators have been killed in or near demonstrations; in many cases they appear to have been shot dead unlawfully when were posing no risk to the lives of the security forces or others. Since the protests began in 2007, the security forces have arrested and detained, in many cases arbitrarily, thousands of demonstrators and bystanders, as well as leaders and activists of the Southern Movement.

Amnesty International issued a report in August 2010 which highlighted the Yemeni government's increasing resort to repressive laws and illegal methods in response to the challenges it faces and to silence its critics. For further information please see *Yemen: Cracking down under pressure* (Index: MDE 31/010/2010), August 2010: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/yemen-abandons-human-rights-name-counterterrorism-2010-08-24>

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