

URGENT ACTION

THREE OMANI JOURNALISTS ON TRIAL FACE JAIL

The trial of two detained Omani journalists in connection with articles they published alleging corruption in the judiciary, and a third journalist for his tweets, is ongoing. A verdict is expected on 19 September in two of the cases.

Ibrahim al-Maamari, editor-in-chief of the daily *Azamn* newspaper, was arrested on 28 July following the publication on 26 July of an article accusing the head of Oman's Supreme Court and the chairman of the Judicial Council of intervening in the outcome of verdicts on behalf of influential officials. **Youssef al-Haj**, deputy editor-in-chief of the paper, was arrested on 9 August after he published a series of articles based on exclusive interviews with the vice-president of Oman's Supreme Court confirming allegations of corruption made in the original article by Ibrahim al-Maamari. On the same day the authorities ordered the shutdown of the newspaper and its on-line news site. **Zaher al-Abri**, a journalist, was arrested on 3 August after he tweeted about the detention of Ibrahim al-Maamari. On 7 September, an administrative court ruled that the order by the Ministry of Information to close the newspaper was not valid.

The trial of the three men before a court of first instance in the capital, Muscat, began on 15 August. Ibrahim al-Maamari and Youssef al-Haj face several charges under Oman's cybercrimes law and the press and publications law; they also face the charge of undermining the prestige of the state. Zaher al-Abri is charged in connection with his tweets and was released on bail on 22 August. The court has banned all reporting on the trial. During the third trial session on 29 August the court set 19 September as the date it would issue its verdict against Ibrahim al-Maamari and Zaher al-Abri. The final defence hearing of Youssef al-Haj was due to take place on 5 September but the session was halted for the court to examine the request of his lawyer to replace the judge in the case.

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

- Calling on the Omani authorities to drop all the charges against Ibrahim al-Maamari, Youssef al-Haj and Zaher al-Abri as they relate solely to the exercise of their right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to immediately and unconditionally release Ibrahim al-Maamari and Youssef al-Haj as they are prisoners of conscience and ensure that, while detained, the two men are protected from torture and other ill treatment and are granted regular access to any medical care they require;
- Urging them to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, including by repealing or amending all legislation that criminalizes this right.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 OCTOBER 2016 TO:

Minister of Justice

Sheikh Abdul Malik al-Khalili
Ministry of Justice
PO Box 354
Ruwi PC 112
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Twitter: @moj_gov
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

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

And copies to:

Chairman, Oman Human Rights

Commission

Dr 'Isa Bin Sa'id Sulayman al-Kiyumii
Fill in form at:
http://www.nhrc.om/website_complaintsadd.php?language=en
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Fax: +968 24 2189 06

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

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

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In September 2011 a court of first instance sentenced Ibrahim al-Maamari to two months in prison and ordered the suspension of the *Azamn* newspaper for one month after the publication in May 2011 of an interview with an employee of the Ministry of Justice who accused the Minister of Justice of career rigging. In January 2012 an appeal court upheld the sentence but did not implement it as the newspaper issued an official apology before the appeal.

On 28 July 2016 Ibrahim al-Maamari was summoned and arrested by Omani State Security. A member of the Public Prosecution office stated that he was facing several charges based on Articles 25 and 29 of the 2016 press and publications law, which can carry up to two years with a fine, as well as the charge of undermining the prestige of the state and its status under Article 135 of the Omani Penal Law, and a misdemeanour charge for publication that would disturb public order under Article 19 of the cybercrimes law.

Youssef al-Haj, deputy editor-in-chief of *Azamn*, published a series of articles based on exclusive interviews with the vice-president of Oman's Supreme Court confirming allegations of corruption made in the earlier article accusing the head of Oman's Supreme Court and the chairman of the Judicial Council of intervening in the outcome of verdicts on behalf of influential officials, which led to the arrest of the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Ibrahim al-Maamari. The latest of these articles was published on 9 August and Youssef al-Haj was arrested the same day at noon. He faces the same charges as Ibrahim al-Maamari with the addition of another two including "disobeying the Ministry of Information's order not to publish details relating to the arrest of *Azamn* employees". In detention Youssef al-Haj has been suffering from shortness of breath and has had repeated asthma attacks; he also has a slipped disc in the back which has been causing him severe pain. He went on hunger strike for a few days in protest at the lack of medical care he received.

In March 2016, following a United Nations review – the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) – of the country's human rights record, the government of Oman rejected recommendations to guarantee the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, including a recommendation to support civil society organizations. Oman only partially accepted recommendations to review current legislation that fails to protect the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

Name: Ibrahim al-Maamari, Youssef al-Haj and Zaher al-Abri
Gender m/f: all men

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