

URGENT ACTION

OMANI JOURNALISTS RELEASED, NEXT HEARING DATE SET

***Azamn* editor-in-chief Ibrahim al-Maamari and deputy editor-in-chief Youssef al-Haj were released on 10 October after the Appeal Court in Muscat reduced their bail. The next hearing in the case has been set for 7 November.**

Ibrahim al-Maamari and **Youssef al-Haj** were released on bail on 10 October after the Appeal Court in the capital Muscat reduced their bail from 50,000 Omani rials (US\$ 130,000) to 2,000 Omani rials (US\$ 5,200). Their colleague and co-defendant *Azamn* journalist **Zaher al-Abri** had been released on a bail of 1,000 Omani rials (about US\$ 2,600) on 22 August. The Appeal Court scheduled 7 November to hear the three men's final pleading in the case.

Officials arrested Ibrahim al-Maamari 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. Zaher al-Abri was arrested on 3 August after he commented on Twitter about the detention of Ibrahim al-Maamari. Youssef al-Haj was arrested on 9 August following the publication of 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 26 September the Court of First Instance in Muscat sentenced Ibrahim al-Maamari and Youssef al-Haj to three years' imprisonment and fines, after convicting them of "undermining the prestige of the state" and other charges under Oman's cybercrimes law and press and publications law. The court also sentenced Zaher al-Abri to a one-year prison sentence and a fine for "misusing the internet", in relation to the tweet he posted following the arrest of Ibrahim al-Maamari; and it upheld a government order to permanently close the *Azamn* newspaper.

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

- Calling on the Omani authorities to immediately quash the convictions of Ibrahim al-Maamari, Youssef al-Haj and Zaher al-Abri, as all three journalists are being punished for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and if convicted, or otherwise detained again, they would be considered prisoners of conscience;
- 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 23 NOVEMBER 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.ohrc.om/website_complaintsa

dden.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. This is the second update of UA 206/16. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde20/4900/2016/en/>

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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 its 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' imprisonment with a fine, as well as charges of undermining the prestige of the state and its status, under Article 135 of the Omani Penal Law, and of publishing material that would disturb public order, under Article 19 of the cybercrimes law.

In detention Youssef al-Haj suffered from shortness of breath and 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 needed. On account of ill health, Youssef al-Haj was held at the Royal Oman Police Hospital in Muscat between 20 and 25 September, after which he was returned to prison.

In March 2016 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 following the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a state-led review of the country's human rights record. Oman only partially accepted recommendations to review current legislation that fails to protect the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

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

Further information on UA: 206/16 Index: MDE 20/4976/2016 Issue Date: 12 October 2016