

URGENT ACTION

POLITICAL ACTIVIST IN CUSTODY, RISKS TORTURE

Yemeni political activist Muhammad Qahtan is in the custody of the Huthi armed group in Yemen. His whereabouts are unknown and he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. There are concerns that his health may be deteriorating.

Political activist **Muhammad Qahtan**, a leading figure in the al-Islah political party, is in the custody of an armed group which controls the capital, Sana'a, and large areas of the country, and is in danger of torture and other ill-treatment.

He was taken from his home in Sana'a on 4 April 2015 at around 1.30pm. According to his family, at least 10 armed members of Ansarullah, the political wing of the Huthi armed group, came to their house in three cars on 4 April, in civilian clothes, and ordered Muhammad Qahtan to go with them. They showed no warrant for his arrest, but took him away. Three days later his family traced him to a house in Sana'a which the Huthis were using as a detention centre. His son Abdulrahman was allowed to see him for 10 minutes. After this the family was allowed to deliver him food at meal times. However, after a few days the Huthis told them to stop bringing food because Muhammad Qahtan was no longer detained there. His family have not heard from him since, and despite repeated requests, the Huthis have not told them where he is. He has type 2 diabetes but was not able to take his medication with him when he was detained. There is a risk his health may be deteriorating and he may need medical attention.

Around 15 members of the Huthi-allied Political Security Office had parked their trucks in front of Muhammad Qahtan's gate a few days before he was detained and began following him whenever he left his home. He is a senior member of the al-Islah party and represented the party in Yemen's National Dialogue Conference, a 10-month long political transition process which began in 2013 following the popular uprisings of 2011. The day before he was taken away, the al-Islah party had released a statement in support of the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition and the legitimacy of Yemeni President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi's authority. A military coalition of 10 countries, led by Saudi Arabia, has been carrying out a campaign of air strikes against the Huthi armed group in Yemen since 25 March 2015.

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

Only Facebook, email and fax will get through, not hard copy letters

- Urging Ansarullah to ensure that Muhammad Qahtan urgently receives the medical attention he may require;
- Urging them to immediately inform his family of his whereabouts and to ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to his family and a lawyer;
- Calling on them to release Muhammad Qahtan unless he is to be transferred to proper judicial authorities and promptly charged with a recognizable criminal offence.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 MARCH 2016 TO:

Deputy Minister of Human Rights

Ali Saleh Taissir

Email: a.taissir@yahoo.com

Salutation: Dear Sir

Director of the Human Rights

Department at Ansarullah Office

Abdulmalik al-Ajari

Facebook page: <http://on.fb.me/1n1y4Mn>

Salutation: Dear Sir

And copies to:

Director of the Office of the Presidency

Mahmod Abdulqader al-Jounid

Fax: +967 1 274147

Email: mahmodaljounid@gmail.com

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

The Huthis, mostly members of the northern Zaidi Shi'a minority, took over some army and security positions in Sana'a in September 2014. By the third week of January 2015 they had attacked military positions, the presidential compounds and government buildings. This led to President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his government resigning and the Huthis becoming the de facto administration of the capital and other parts of Yemen.

Since then, the Huthis have been consolidating their hold on Sana'a and the rest of the country. On 6 February 2015 they dissolved parliament and issued a constitutional declaration mandating the creation of a transitional presidential council, which was established to act as a government for an interim period of two years. On 23 March, the conflict between, on the one hand, the Huthis, supported by Yemeni army units and some security forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and, on the other, the army units loyal to President Hadi, supported by certain tribes and armed groups, intensified in the south of the country, which until then had been outside Huthi control.

A military coalition of 10 countries, led by Saudi Arabia, began a campaign of air strikes on 25 March against the Huthis in support of the forces loyal to President Hadi. The first air strikes hit Huthi targets and military installations, mainly in Sana'a and Sa'da, in the north of the country, and later Aden and elsewhere. Both sides have committed human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes. Over 2,700 civilians in Yemen have died since the conflict began, with indiscriminate attacks by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition killing many civilians. The conflict has exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation, with over 2.5 million people displaced and 82% of the population in need of humanitarian assistance.

There has been a surge in arbitrary arrests, detentions and abductions by the Huthi armed group and allied forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh since the beginning of the Saudi Arabian-led coalition's aerial campaign. Scores of activists and people of various political backgrounds perceived as opponents by the Huthis have been arbitrarily arrested, detained and, in some cases, tortured and otherwise ill-treated. The majority of those targeted have been leaders, members or supporters of the political party al-Islah, which has been vocal in condemning the Huthis' violations since they took over Sana'a in September 2014 and are perceived as supportive of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition's air strikes. Most of these arrests have taken place in the cities of Sana'a, Ibb and Hodeidah. Huthis have also harassed and arrested journalists and activists who have criticized their takeover of government institutions.

Amnesty International has interviewed dozens of former detainees and families of detainees in Sana'a, Ibb and Hodeidah who were arbitrarily arrested and held incommunicado in unknown locations during 2015. Many people were taken from their homes without warrants by Huthis and allied forces who forced their way in. Many have been held in multiple locations including unofficial detention centres such as private homes, without being given the chance to challenge the lawfulness of their detention or being told why they were being detained.

Name: Muhammad Qahtan

Gender m/f: m

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