



Mwatana for Human Rights



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **NGOs demand release of journalists held by Huthi forces for two years**

The Huthi and allied forces should immediately and unconditionally release ten Yemeni journalists detained arbitrarily without charge or trial, said nine NGOs today, on the second anniversary of their detention.

The organizations remain extremely concerned for the well-being of the journalists.

Family members of the journalists told Amnesty International that all ten men are currently held in the Political Security Office (PSO) in Sana'a, after access to their families was further restricted throughout the month of May. Nine of the journalists were also interrogated during this month. To Amnesty International's knowledge, this was the first time that some of these men had been questioned since their arrest two years ago.

Abdelkhaleq Amran, Hisham Tarmoom, Tawfiq al-Mansouri, Hareth Hamid, Hasan Annab, Akram al-Walidi, Haytham al-Shihab, Hisham al-Yousefi and Essam Balgheeth have been detained since 9 June 2015 when they were arrested by armed men in a room from where they were working in Qasr Al-Ahlam Hotel, Sana'a. Those who arrested the men were dressed in a mixture of civilian, military and General Security clothing, and some had slogans on their weapons that are associated with the Huthi armed group and its political wing, Ansarullah.

According to their families, the men are not aware of the reasons for their continued detention, and have not been formally charged or brought to trial. In the past, family

members told Amnesty International that the detainees told them they overheard guards saying that the nine journalists are being held because they are linked to “terrorism” and “tarnishing the image of the Huthi popular committees”, as well as “working for Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, America and Israel.” The journalists work for a variety of news outlets, some of which oppose the Huthi armed group, while others are aligned to the al-Islah opposition political party.

On 28 August 2015 a tenth journalist, Salah al-Qaedi, was also arrested by members of the Huthi forces at his home, also in Sana’a. Salah al-Qaedi’s family told Amnesty International that he had been tortured during his detention. There are no formal charges against him but his family suspect he is being detained because he worked for the al-Islah aligned Suhayl Channel, which was raided in September 2014 by the Huthi forces and eventually shut down in March 2015.

The families of some of the journalists told Amnesty International that they believe increased visiting restrictions were in retaliation for the peaceful campaigning activities some of them undertook around World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May 2017, including an online campaign and vigils in front of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Sana’a, as well in Ma’rib, Ta’iz and Aden. At the time of writing, at least seven families confirmed that they were allowed a visit last week, having had restricted access for over a month.

All ten journalists have had illnesses and medical conditions<sup>1</sup> caused or aggravated by their detention conditions or treatment, including abdominal and intestinal pain, hearing problems, hemorrhoids and headaches, their families told Amnesty International. Some have been taken to a hospital outside of the prison for medical treatment but have not been given appropriate medication. Others have been denied medical treatment altogether.

According to Essam Balgheeth’s family, when they last visited him at the end of May, he was suffering from dizziness and regular fainting episodes. The prison authorities refused to take him to a hospital and would not allow his family to bring him natural remedies, such as honey, during their visits. Several other families were also not allowed to bring medication to their detained relatives.

Tawfiq al-Mansouri has also been suffering from deteriorating health. According to his family, he was diagnosed with a swelling in his prostate and has only received painkillers and topical medications as treatment.

The ten journalists must be released immediately and unconditionally, as they are detained solely for their peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and their perceived political opinions. Pending the journalists’ release, the de facto Huthi authorities must ensure that they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment and are given, without delay, regular access to their families, lawyers and adequate medical treatment.

There has been a surge<sup>2</sup> in arbitrary arrests, detentions and enforced disappearances by Huthi and allied forces of their critics and opponents, as well as journalists, human rights defenders and members of the Baha’i community since the beginning of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition’s

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<sup>1</sup> Reporters Without Borders, Concern about health of journalists held by Houthis in Sana’a, 12 April 2017  
<https://rsf.org/en/news/concern-about-health-journalists-held-houthis-sanaa>

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch, Yemen: Abusive Detentions Rife Under Houthis, 17 November 2016,  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/17/yemen-abusive-detention-rife-under-houthis>

aerial campaign in March 2015. Mwatana Organization for Human Rights<sup>3</sup> has documented the arbitrary detention of five other journalists by the Huthi authorities in Sana'a and Dhamar, including one detainee who has been forcibly disappeared since June 2015. Reporters without Borders have documented the arbitrary detention of another additional journalist by Huthi forces.

On 12 April 2017, Yemeni journalist Yahia al-Jubaihi, who has been arbitrarily detained since September 2016, was sentenced to death by the de facto Huthi authorities for allegedly communicating with Saudi Arabian-led coalition forces.<sup>4</sup> The death sentence against Yahia al-Jubaihi must immediately be quashed and the Huthi authorities must ensure he is retried in proceedings that conform to international fair trial standards and without the possibility of a death sentence or released.

Yemen is ranked 166th (out of 180) in Reporters Without Border's 2017 World Press Freedom Index.

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Amnesty International

Article 19

Committee to Protect Journalists

Gulf Center for Human Rights

Human Rights Watch

Index on Censorship

Mwatana Organization for Human Rights

PEN International

Reporters Without Borders

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<sup>3</sup> Mwatana Organization for Human Rights, Press in Yemen faces the risk of eradication, 3 May 2017, <http://www.mwatana.org/en/352017616>

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, Yemen: Journalist Yahia al-Jubaihi sentenced to death by Huthi forces <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/yemen-journalist-yahia-al-jubaihi-sentenced-to-death-by-huthi-forces/>