

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 31/004/2008

12 August 2008

UA 222/08      Possible prisoner of conscience/ fear of torture and other ill-treatment

YEMEN      Dr Mohamed al-Saqaf, (m), aged 60, lawyer and academic

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Dr Mohamed al-Saqaf, a lawyer and university lecturer, was arrested on 11 August by security forces at the airport in the capital, Sana'a. He is being held by the National Security forces (*al-Amn al-Qawmi*) at the Criminal investigation prison in Sana'a, where he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. He may be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

The charges brought against Dr Mohamed al-Saqaf include "undermining national unity", a vaguely worded charge which refers to his support for peaceful protestors in southern Yemen, his criticism of the government's repression of these protestors, and discrimination against people from southern Yemen.

Dr Mohamed al-Saqaf is the lawyer of Hassan Ba'oom, who was arrested in connection with demonstrations in cities across southern Yemen (see UA 198/07, MDE 31/009/2007, 3 August 2007, and follow-ups). The protests were staged by retired soldiers from southern Yemen, who complain that they are discriminated against in employment, salaries and pensions compared to retired soldiers from the north of the country. Hassan Ba'oom is one of several activists now on trial before a court in Sana'a, on charges including "undermining national unity".

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Detainees held by the National Security forces, including those detained at the Criminal Investigation prison, have reported being tortured and otherwise ill-treated.

Until 1990, Yemen was divided into the southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the northern Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). After reunification, the armies of the two former countries were merged, but following an internal armed conflict in 1994, many soldiers of the former PDRY were dismissed. They, and former PDRY soldiers who were allowed to remain in the army, say that they face discrimination. Activists have increasingly been voicing their concern at this discrimination and the lack of employment opportunities for those from the former PDRY.

#### RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, English or your own language:

- urging the Yemeni authorities to ensure that Dr Mohamed al-Saqaf is protected from torture and other ill-treatment;
- calling on the authorities either to charge Dr Mohamed al-Saqaf with a recognizably criminal offence or release him immediately;
- noting that Amnesty International would believe him to be a prisoner of conscience if he is held solely for exercising his right to free speech;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that any legal proceedings against him conform to international fair trial standards.

#### APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency General 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh  
President of the Republic of Yemen  
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

**Fax: + 967 127 4147**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Attorney General

His Excellency 'Abdullah al-'Ulufi  
Office of Attorney General  
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

**Fax: + 967 137 4412**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Dr Rashid Muhammad al-'Alimi  
Ministry of Interior  
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

**Fax: + 967 133 2511**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Human Rights

Her Excellency Houda 'Ali 'Abdullatif al-Baan  
Ministry for Human Rights  
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

**Faxes: + 967 1 444 838**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Dr Ghazi Shaif Al-Aghbari  
Ministry of Justice  
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

**Fax: + 967 1 222 015**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Yemen accredited to your country

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 September 2008.