

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST THREATENED

Human rights activist Tawakkol Karman could be at risk after a family member reportedly received a call on 26 January threatening that her life could be in danger. Amnesty International believes that Tawakkol Karman is being targeted for her activism and role in organizing and taking part in recent protests and sit-ins in Yemen.

According to information received by Amnesty International, Tawakkol Karman's brother was reported to have received a phone call on 26 January asking him to either confine his sister to her house or "those who weaken the whip of obedience would be killed". Tawakkol Karman, President of Women Journalists Without Chains, a Yemeni NGO, was arrested on 23 January, a day after she took part in a student demonstration in solidarity with the protests in Tunisia, calling on Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to stand down. She was released on 24 January after being charged with taking part in an unlicensed protest. Dozens of activists who protested with Tawakkol Karman were also arrested on 23 January. Most of them were released on 24 January after they were also charged with taking part in an unlicensed protest.

Tawakkol Karman told Amnesty International that she takes such a threat seriously and believes that it comes from the authorities. In the past she has been approached on a number of occasions by people she considered close to the authorities who warned her that her safety was at risk and that she should be careful. She intends to pursue her work despite the intimidation. "I shall continue," she told Amnesty International. "I chose this road and at the end of the day it is a matter of sacrifice. People are peacefully protesting and they are facing repression."

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the Yemeni authorities to ensure Tawakkol Karman's safety in accordance with her wishes;
- Calling on the Yemeni authorities to conduct an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into the threats made against Tawakkol Karman, and hold those responsible to account;
- Calling on the Yemeni authorities to allow demonstrators to take to the streets and express their political opinions in a peaceful manner.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 MARCH 2011 TO:

President

His Excellency Ali Abdullah Saleh
Office of the President of the Republic
of Yemen
Sana'a
Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 274 147
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Dr Ghazi Shaif al-
Aghbari
Ministry of Justice
Sana'a
Republic of Yemen
Tel: + 967 1 256 933
Fax: + 967 1 222 015 (not getting
through on this number)
E-mail: moj@yemen.net.ye
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Human Rights

Her Excellency Dr Huda Ali Abdullatef
Alban
Ministry for Human Rights
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 419 700 (please keep
trying)
Email: mshr@y.net.ye
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Yemeni government has become increasingly intolerant of independent media and any criticism directed towards it. Journalists, editors and publishers have been detained, held incommunicado, ill-treated and jailed on spurious charges after unfair trials.

Security forces have raided newspaper offices and television stations and shot at demonstrators peacefully protesting against repression of free speech. Newspapers have also been suspended and news websites blocked.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed by Yemen's Constitution. However, this right is undermined by restrictive laws and practices, particularly the 1990 Press and Publications Law, and by the Specialized Press and Publications Court set up in May 2009. The court appears to be aimed at suppressing dissent by fast-tracking cases brought against government critics.

In March 2010, Tawakkol Karman told Amnesty International that when activists and journalists started being increasingly harassed and intimidated in Yemen, Women Journalists Without Chains started organizing sit-ins in May 2007. The sit-ins took place every Tuesday, and later started to take a wider scope. They are now not only about restrictions on the press, but also an opportunity for anyone who has human rights concerns to come to the sit-in and take part and raise concerns. "The sit-in became a haven for the oppressed," said Tawakkol Karman.

Amnesty International delegates experienced first-hand the authorities' hostility towards coverage of protests in defence of free speech. As they watched a peaceful demonstration in Sana'a in March 2010, organized by Women Journalists Without Chains, police threatened to arrest and bring charges against an Amnesty International delegate who was carrying a camera if any attempt was made to photograph the peaceful march. They said it was illegal for the delegates even to be present, even though the women journalists were holding their protest peacefully and in a public place. The Amnesty International delegates also witnessed the arrest of a protester who was carrying a camera, though he was released, without his camera, when other protesters complained about this. Meanwhile, men in plain clothes who appeared to be security personnel filmed and photographed people involved in the demonstration.

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