

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED JOURNALIST ON HUNGER STRIKE

Ahmad Maher, a 28-year-old Yemeni journalist, who was arrested on 6 August 2022 by security forces in Aden, is on trial before the Aden-based Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) on charges of disseminating false and misleading news and forging identity documents. During interrogations at the Dar Sa'ad police station, security forces subjected him to torture and other ill-treatment to force him to "confess" to being involved in an attack on Dar Sa'ad police station in March 2022. He has been denied access to adequate healthcare including for injuries sustained as a result of torture. His trial rights have been severely violated including his right to adequate defence, to access a lawyer of his choosing, to presumption of innocence and to not self-incriminate, rendering his detention arbitrary. According to his family, Ahmad Maher has been on hunger strike since 17 January to demand a fair trial, amid mounting concerns for his health.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Major General Aidaros Alzubidi

President of the Southern Transitional Council; X: @AidrosAlzubidi

Dear Major General Aidaros Alzubidi,

*I am concerned that Southern Transitional Council (STC) de facto authorities have subjected arbitrarily detained journalist **Ahmad Maher**, 28, to torture and other ill-treatment and have severely violated his fair trial rights. Since December 2023, he has been on several hunger strikes in Bir Ahmad prison in Aden, most recently since 17 January, to demand a fair trial, amid his family's concerns over his poor health.*

According to a family member, on 6 August 2022, security forces of Dar Sa'ad police station stormed Ahmad Maher's house in Dar Sa'ad neighbourhood without a warrant, beat him with the butts of their rifles and assaulted other family members. Following his arrest, he was detained at Dar Sa'ad police station for over a month, during which he was denied family visits and access to a lawyer. According to a relative, Ahmad Maher was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment daily, including through beatings, water boarding, electric shocks, and mock executions. In addition, he was threatened with harm to his family, including his wife and baby girl, to force him to "confess" to involvement in an attack on Dar Sa'ad police station which took place in March 2022. Authorities have denied Ahmad Maher access to medical care, including for injuries sustained to his navel area as a result of torture.

In December 2022, Ahmad Maher's trial began before the Aden-based Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) on charges of disseminating false and misleading news and forging identity documents. He is tried together with a group of other detainees charged with carrying out an attack on Dar Sa'ad police station in March 2022, although, according to his lawyer, the prosecution has failed to present any evidence indicating his involvement. He has been denied access to a lawyer of his choosing since his arrest. During a hearing before the SCC on 6 March 2023, Ahmad Maher told the judge that he was subjected to torture and that his "confession" was extracted under duress, but the judge failed to order an investigation. The next hearing in his trial, which has been repeatedly delayed, is scheduled for 30 January.

I urge you to drop all charges against Ahmad Maher solely related to the exercise of his human rights and release him unless tried for internationally recognizable offences in proceedings meeting international standards for fair trial, excluding "confessions" extracted under torture or duress. I also urge you to ensure that Ahmad Maher is protected from further torture and other ill-treatment and that he is given, without delay, access to adequate medical care and regular access to his lawyer and family.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 4 September 2022, Dar Sa'ad police station released a video which was shared on social media and national media news outlets featuring Ahmad Maher. In the video, which Amnesty International analysed, Maher appears to "confess" to criminal offences including the forgery of identity documents for members of the military and his knowledge of assassination schemes against two STC military generals. According to his lawyer, the video, which violates his right to presumption of innocence, was not requested by the prosecution and was not recorded in their presence. A few days after the video was made public, a member of the criminal prosecution interrogated Maher in Dar Sa'ad police station in the presence of members of Dar Sa'ad security forces who all were, according to Ahmad Maher's relative, involved in his torture. During questioning by the prosecution, Ahmad Maher retracted his "confession", stating that he was forced to make it under duress, and asked for referral to medical treatment. The prosecution requested the director of the police station to refer Maher for treatment, but the request was refused.

On 15 September 2022, Ahmad Maher was transferred to Bir Ahmad prison, where he continues to be held, without access to a lawyer.

All parties to the conflict in Yemen have perpetrated grave human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, and unfair trials. In November 2023, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen [reported](#) that STC affiliated forces are detaining, subjecting to enforced disappearance, or threatening journalists and activists who publicly criticize them and are forcing them to sign or deliver "confessions". The Panel also documented that STC-affiliated forces are systematically torturing detainees in formal and secret prisons.

In July 2018, Amnesty International published a [report](#) on enforced disappearances and detention violations committed by UAE-backed security forces, including the Security Belt forces in southern Yemen. Many arrests appeared to be based on unfounded suspicions and personal vendettas. Among those targeted were former fighters who fought in the 2015 battles to rout the Huthis from the south and who were later seen as a threat; sympathizers and members of the Hadi-aligned al-Islah Party, Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood branch; as well as activists and critics of the coalition.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 22 March 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ahmad Maher (he/him)