

URGENT ACTION

POLITICAL ACTIVIST FACING TRIAL BEFORE MILITARY COURT FOR FACEBOOK POST

On 21 December 2023, the Jordanian authorities arrested Ayman Sanduka, political activist and mathematics professor, in relation to a Facebook post addressed to the King in October 2023 in which he criticized Jordan's diplomatic relations with Israel. On 12 February 2024, a prosecutor at the State Security Court, an exceptional military court, charged Ayman Sanduka with "incitement to oppose the political regime", under article 149 of the Penal Code. Ayman Sanduka's next hearing before the SSC is scheduled for 26 March. The Jordanian authorities must drop all charges and immediately and unconditionally release Ayman Sanduka as he is being prosecuted solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

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

His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein
Royal Hashemite Court
Amman, Jordan
Twitter: @KingAbdullahII

Your Majesty,

I am writing to express my grave concern about Ayman Sanduka, a political activist and mathematics professor, who is being prosecuted before the State Security Court (SSC) for the exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

Ayman Sanduka was initially summoned by the public prosecutor on 18 December 2023 in relation to Facebook posts expressing pro-Palestinian sentiments, including a call for a general strike in support of Gaza. On 24 January 2024, a criminal court sentenced Ayman Sanduka to three months in prison on charges of "defaming an official body", under the new Cybercrime Law.

On 21 December 2023, the State Security Court prosecutor summoned and detained Ayman Sanduka in relation to a letter he posted on Facebook in October addressed to Your Majesty in which he criticized Jordan's diplomatic relations with Israel. According to his lawyer, on 23 January 2024, Ayman Sanduka was transferred from Marka prison in Amman to Al-Tafilah prison, which is about 300 km from his hometown, making it very hard for his family to visit him. Security forces also subjected him to verbal humiliation, and, during his transfer, tightly tied his hands and feet. On 12 February 2024, the State Security Court prosecutor added an additional charge against Ayman Sanduka of "incitement to oppose the political regime", under article 149 of the Penal Code. Ayman Sanduka's next hearing before the SSC is scheduled for 26 March. The SSC is a military court which fails to meet international standards of impartiality and independence and is often used to prosecute civilians and silence dissent in violation of international law.

I urge you to ensure that the Kingdom of Jordan does not violate international human rights law and that Ayman Sanduka is immediately and unconditionally released and that all charges against him are dropped as they stem from his legitimate expression online. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he is protected from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and has access to adequate medical care on request or as necessary.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since October 2023, Jordanian authorities have intensified their crackdown on pro-Palestinian activists using vague and overly broad criminal provisions, including the Crime Prevention Law, the 1960 Penal Code, and the newly amended Cybercrime Law. At least 1,000 people – protesters and bystanders – were arrested during protests in support of Gaza in Amman within a one-month period between October and November 2023. As of February 2024, more than 2,000 people have been arrested in connection with the pro-Palestine protests.

The recent crackdown is part of a demonstrable pattern of Jordan's crackdown on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression through the use of repressive laws. In a visit to Jordan in September 2023, Amnesty International documented the authorities' prosecution of nine activists, journalists and others for criticizing the authorities' conduct and policies, organizing discussions on issues deemed "sensitive" by the authorities, and calling for anti-government protests. In 2023, the authorities, including security forces and civilian and military courts, investigated or prosecuted at least 43 individuals for online expression using abusive and vague laws such as the Cybercrimes Law of 2015, Anti-Terrorism Law and Penal Code.

Jordanian authorities use the State Security Court (SSC), a special military court, as a tool to crack down on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Jordan's Counterterrorism Law of 2006 was amended in 2014 to broaden the definition of terrorism to include acts such as "disturbing relations with a foreign state", a charge that was already criminalized in the Penal Code, as well as "disturbing the public order". These amendments enabled the judiciary to criminalize peaceful human rights activism as acts of terrorism tried before the SSC instead of as misdemeanours tried by other criminal courts, resulting in lengthy prison terms. In addition, the Penal Code criminalizes any act that "undermines the political regime or incites opposition to it". These provisions have been frequently used by the SSC and security agencies to arrest and charge activists for speech-related offences.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English and Arabic.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 July 2024.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ayman Sanduka (he/him).