

# URGENT ACTION

## PRISONERS IN OMAN ON HUNGER STRIKE

**Dozens of people detained in relation to the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly are on hunger strike to protest against the delay in some of their appeals. Amnesty International considers all those held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to be prisoners of conscience.**

At least 31 people held in Sama'il Central Prison in Oman are on hunger strike in protest at the delay of the Supreme Court to hear some of their appeals. They are also calling for the security services to stop interfering in the work of the judiciary. Seventeen prisoners began their hunger strikes on 9 February 2013. On 12 February, an additional seven, including activist **Basimah al-Rajhi** and lawyer **Basma al-Kiyumi**, joined the hunger strike. All 24 had been arrested and tried in 2012 on various charges, including participating in protests and insulting the Sultan. On 16 February a further eight people who had been convicted for events that took place in Sohar in 2011 joined the hunger strike in solidarity with the 24. At least one of them, **Salem al-Ma'amari**, stopped his hunger strike on 18 February after his health deteriorated. According to Omani activists, two men who joined the hunger strike on 16 February – have recently sewn their mouths shut in solidarity.

**Sa'eed al-Hashemi** was reportedly placed in solitary confinement on 12 February for leading the strike. On 13 February he was reported to have been taken to hospital for treatment after his health deteriorated.

The Appeal Court in the capital, Muscat, upheld verdicts against 29 activists in December 2012. Twenty-eight of the 29 activists are to serve prison sentences ranging from six months to a year; the 29th received a suspended prison sentence. On 16 January 2013, the Appeal Court in Muscat upheld the sentences against seven activists, two of whom are also serving sentences that were upheld in December. An additional two activists had their sentences reduced. The Court of First Instance in Muscat had convicted the 36 activists in several separate trials from 26 June to 16 September. Most began immediately serving their sentences after they were upheld.

### **Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:**

- Calling on the Omani authorities to release, immediately and unconditionally, all those held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, as they would be prisoners of conscience;
- Calling on them to drop all charges, and overturn all convictions, related solely to the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Urging the authorities to refrain from taking punitive measures against prisoners for undertaking hunger strikes;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that those reasonably suspected of a recognisably criminal offence are promptly tried in proceedings that fully conform to international fair trial standards or released.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 APRIL 2013 TO:**

Head of State and Prime Minister

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id  
Diwan of the Royal Court  
The Palace  
Muscat 113  
Sultanate of Oman  
Fax: +968 24 735 375  
**Salutation: Your Majesty**

Minister of the Interior

His Excellency Hamoud bin Faisal bin  
Said Al Busaidi  
Minister of the Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
PO Box 127, Ruwi 112, Muscat  
Sultanate of Oman  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**

Chairman

National Human Rights Commission  
Mr Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Riyami  
P.O. Box 29, Postal Code: 103  
Bareq A' Shati  
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman  
Fax: +968 24 648 801

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fifth update of UA 174/12. Further information:  
<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE20/005/2012/en>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Dozens of Omani activists have been sentenced or are standing trial in relation to the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. The trials began in 2012 after numerous writers, activists and bloggers were arrested in Oman in late May and early June 2012. During this time, Oman's Public Prosecution issued a number of statements threatening to take legal action against anyone who publishes "offensive writing" in the media or online deemed to incite others to action "under the pretext of freedom of expression".

The crackdown began on 31 May 2012, with the arrest of three activists who tried to travel to Fohoud oil field, approximately 250km south-west of Muscat, to document an oil workers' strike that had started a week earlier. The three – lawyer Yaqoub al-Kharousi and activists Habeeba al-Hina'i and Ismail al-Muqbali from the newly formed Omani Group for Human Rights – were reportedly charged in connection with inciting a protest. In June several dozen more writers and activists were arrested – at least 22 people were detained on 11 June alone after protesting peacefully outside Muscat's police headquarters, where they were calling for the three arrested on 31 May to be set free.

On 5 December the Muscat Appeal Court upheld convictions against five men and a woman for insulting the Sultan and using the internet to publish defamatory material. Abdullah al-Abdali, Bassam Abu Qasida, Hilal al-Busa'idi, Issa al-Mas'udi, and Muhammad al-Kiyumi received sentences of a year in prison and a fine of 1,000 riyals (around US\$2,600) each. The woman, Maymouna al-Badi, left the court with a sentence of 20 days' imprisonment.

On 12 December the Muscat Appeal Court upheld the Court of First Instance's convictions of 11 men and one woman for insulting the Sultan and using the internet to publish defamatory material. Ten of the men – Abdullah al-Arimi, Abdullah al-Siyabi, Ali al-Muqbali, Hamad al-Kharousi, Mahmoud al-Rawahi, Mohamed al-Badi, Mohamed al-Habsi, Nabhan al-Hanashi, Rashed al-Badi, and Taleb al-Ebri – and the woman, Mona Harden, were sentenced to a year in prison and a fine of 200 to 1,000 riyals (around US\$520 to US \$2,600), while the 12th defendant, Hamoud al-Rashidi, received a suspended six-month prison sentence.

Verdicts against 11 other activists, nine men and two women, who had been sentenced to six months in prison and a fine of 200 riyals for unlawful gathering, were also upheld by the Appeal Court on 12 December. The 11 activists are Abdullah al-Ghilani, Badr al-Jaberi, Basimah al-Rajih, Basma al-Kiyumi, Khaled al-Nawfali, Mahmoud al-Jamoudi, Mahmoud al-Rawahi, Mohamed al-Fazari, Mukhtar al-Hina'i, Nasser al-Ghilani and Sa'eed al-Hashimi.

On 16 January 2013, the Muscat Appeal Court upheld the sentences against seven activists for insulting the Sultan and violating Oman's internet laws of between 12 to 18 months' imprisonment and a fine of 1,000 riyals. The seven include Usama al-Tawayyah, Ahmed al-Mu'ammari, Awadh al-Sawafi, Mukhtar al-Hina'i, Mohammed al-Jamoudi, Ismail al-Muqbali and Hassan Raqishi. Mohammed al-Jamoudi and Mukhtar al-Hina'i were already serving sentences that were upheld on 12 December. In addition, Ishaq al-Aghbari and Ali al-Hajji in the same case had their sentences reduced to three and six months' respectively.

Protests in Oman in early 2011 – that coincided with popular unrest across the Middle East and North Africa – led to a number of political and social reforms, but tight restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly remained in place. Scores of protesters were arrested and many brought to trial in 2011. Omani police also violently dispersed protests on a number of occasions, leading to the reported death of at least one man in the town of Sohar.

Name: Basimah al-Rajih (f), Basma al-Kiyumi (f), Salem al-Ma'amari (m), Sa'eed al-Hashemi (m), and the other hunger strikers  
Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 174/12 Index: MDE 20/001/2013 Issue Date: 19 February 2013