

URGENT ACTION

KUWAITI JOURNALIST RELEASED ON BAIL

Kuwaiti journalist and blogger Muhammad 'Abd al-Qader al-Jasem, held since 11 May 2010, was released following a court appearance on 28 June. His bail was set at 2000 Kuwaiti Dinar (about US\$6850).

Muhammad 'Abd al-Qader al-Jasem was detained on 11 May 2010 after he handed himself in to State Security officials. He had been informed by an official from the State Prosecutor's Office that an arrest warrant was being issued against him and he decided to turn himself in. He was then served with a 21-day administrative detention order; though he was held in total for 49 days. He was charged with a range of offences on account of statements he is alleged to have made on his blog (<http://www.aljasem.org>).

Following his arrest, he made four court appearances. At the third, the presiding judge agreed that a medical committee should be appointed to assess his health and decide whether he should be detained in hospital, as Muhammad al-Jasem has had a series of heart operations in recent years. He was then held in a hospital for a further week until 28 June, when the judge ordered his release on bail.

Muhammad 'Abd al-Qader al-Jasem is next due to appear in court on 20 September 2010. He faces charges of seeking to overthrow the government; belittling the personage of the Amir, by way of statements he is alleged to have made in his blog (<http://www.aljasem.org>); and seeking to dismantle the foundations of Kuwaiti society. If convicted, he could face up to at least 18 years of imprisonment.

Ghanim Alnajjar, a longstanding human rights activist and professor of political science at Kuwait University, who observed all four recent trial sessions, has written, "As it stands now, although his release seems like a victory for human rights defenders, it is only a partial one." He noted that Muhammad al-Jasem faces, in all, more than 20 cases brought against him by the Prime Minister of Kuwait and others, part of a wider pattern of prosecutions brought by the Prime Minister against his critics. (see: <http://livewire.amnesty.org/2010/06/30/an-unusual-suspect-the-case-of-muhamad-abdulqader-al-jasem/>)

Muhammad al-Jasem was previously arrested on 22 November 2009 and detained for 12 days, then released and later brought to trial charged with criminal defamation. On 1 April 2010, he was convicted and sentenced to six months' imprisonment on this charge.

For further information please see: UA: 316/09 Index: MDE 17/002/2009, 25 November 2009 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE17/002/2009/en> , update: MDE 17/002/2010, 10 February 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE17/002/2010/en> ; UA 145/10 MDE 17/005/2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE17/005/2010/en> ; Web story: Kuwait urged to release blogger who criticised Prime Minister, 14 May 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/kuwait-urged-release-blogger-who-criticised-prime-minister-2010-05-14> and Public statement: Kuwait: Release journalist Muhammad 'Abd al-Qader al-Jasem, Index: MDE 17/004/2010, 4 June 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE17/004/2010/en>

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals. Amnesty International will take further action as necessary if Muhammad 'Abd al-Qader al-Jasem is rearrested or imprisoned as a prisoner of conscience.

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