

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 31/06/92
Distrib: PG/SC

Date: 26 May 1992

@MEDICAL CONCERN

Death in custody and prison conditions in the Republic of Yemen

Amnesty International has expressed concern to the Yemeni authorities about the death of Sufyan Hamoud Muhammad 'Affan in early May 1992. He had been imprisoned for almost ten years and was aged approximately 35. The exact cause of death is at present not known to Amnesty International, but it is clear that he had been seriously ill for some years and was without any proper medical treatment in prison. He was admitted to hospital in February 1992 shortly after a visit from Amnesty International and died in the hospital on 4 May 1992. The provision of medical care in some Yemeni prisons appears to be very limited and in some instances would appear to amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners vulnerable to illness.

Sufyan Hamoud Muhammad 'Affan

Sufyan Hamoud Muhammad 'Affan was a labourer from Bani Wahban in Shar'ab al-Salam in the Province of Ta'iz in the former Yemen Arab Republic (YAR)¹. He was a member of the National Democratic Front, the principal opposition group in the former YAR, and was arrested in his village in 1982. He was charged with murder and in November 1983 sentenced by the Court of First Instance in Ta'iz to 120,000 Rials *diyya* (a fine imposed in accordance with tribal custom in Yemen). On 2 January 1984, however, he was given a sentence of death by the Ta'iz Court of Appeal which was subsequently upheld by the Supreme Court of Cassation in Sana'a.

Sufyan Hamoud Muhammad 'Affan is reported to have been severely tortured at the time of his arrest. He was badly beaten all over his body during interrogation and asked to give names and information about members of the National Democratic Front. He was also suspended for a prolonged period from a metal bar inserted between the knees and arms while his wrists were tied together. In addition, his feet were shackled throughout the first seven years of his imprisonment.

An Amnesty International delegation visited Yemen in February 1992 and met with government and prison officials as well as political prisoners, including Sufyan Hamoud Muhammad 'Affan whom the delegation met in Ta'iz prison where he was held. It appears that some of his health problems began shortly after his imprisonment and ill-treatment. He was unable to digest food properly as a result of which he was severely malnourished. There were some suggestions that he had suffered damage to the gastro-intestinal tract during his beatings, but no cause of the problem appears to have been established while he was imprisoned. At the time of the visit, he was visibly emaciated, unable to walk without support, very weak and unable to

¹On 22 May 1990 the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) merged to form the Republic of Yemen.

speak very clearly. Amnesty International delegates raised his case with the Yemeni authorities and urged that he receive immediate medical attention. He was admitted to al-Thawra Hospital in the city of Tai-iz the following day, on 28 February 1992, and died there on 4 May 1992.

His medical history and the cause of his death are not known, although it was suggested to Amnesty International delegates that he may have been suffering from tuberculosis or cancer. No tests appear to have been performed in prison, however, and it appears that while medicines can be bought if a prisoner has money, the medical supplies and facilities provided by the government are minimal. It is not known whether a post-mortem was carried out, although this is unlikely, and Amnesty International is currently seeking confirmation of the cause of death.

Mahdi 'Abdu Haydara al-Salimi

Mahdi 'Abdu Haydara al-Salimi was a political prisoner held for almost ten years in the central prison in Dhahran. He is reported to have died on 16 April 1992. Again, the cause of death is not known to Amnesty International, but his family are known to have requested that an autopsy be performed to determine the cause of death. Amnesty International delegates visiting Yemen in February 1992 were unable to see Mahdi 'Abdu Haydara al-Salimi and were told that he had been admitted to hospital. No details of his medical history are known to Amnesty International.

Medical facilities and care

Amnesty International delegates met with political prisoners in the central prisons of Sana'a, Ta'iz, Dhahran and al-Hodaidah in February 1992 and were concerned by the evidence of the poor level of health care provided in some of the prisons. Prison doctors are employed by the Ministry of Health and generally visit two or three times a week. The doctors normally have assistants who are more readily available. However, there appears to be little funding provided for drugs or diagnostic tests and those prisoners without personal financial resources receive quite inadequate care. The number confined in any of the central prisons (the main prisons situated in large towns) ranges from 600 to 2,500.

In the prisons visited by Amnesty International in February 1992 there was a general problem of overcrowding. Ventilation often appeared to be poor and, in a city such as al-Hodaidah, a port on the Red Sea, temperatures can reach over 50°C and humidity is very high. This clearly causes suffering and is deleterious to health. There was a high incidence of malaria, tuberculosis and other respiratory problems in the prisons visited by Amnesty International delegates. In Sana'a central prison Amnesty International was told that prisoners with tuberculosis were held separately from others and received drug treatment. It is not clear whether this is the case in other prisons and it would appear that prison doctors are provided with insufficient resources to deal adequately with prisoners' needs. The central prison in Sana'a also houses a "reform centre" where individuals with mental health problems are reported to be housed. There are currently approximately 115 people in this centre which is run jointly with the Ministry of Health.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned by the suffering caused to prisoners as a result of poor conditions and inadequate medical care and is urging the authorities to review the situation as a matter of urgency and to improve health care in prisons in order to prevent any further unnecessary suffering and death.

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 31/06/92
 Distrib: PG/SC

To: Medical professionals
 From: Medical Office / Research Department - Middle East
 Date: 26 May 1992

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

Death in custody and prison conditions REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

Keywords

Theme: Death in custody/ medical care/ prison conditions

Summary

Amnesty International is expressing its concern to the authorities in the Republic of Yemen about the death of Sufyan Hamoud Muhammad 'Affan on 4 May 1992. He had been imprisoned for almost ten years and, although seriously ill, appears to have been without any proper medical care during his imprisonment. A second prisoner, Mahdi 'Abdu Haydara al-Salimi, died in April 1992 in unclear circumstances. The provision of medical care in some Yemeni prisons would appear to be so poor as to amount to cruel and inhuman treatment of ill prisoners and Amnesty International is urging the authorities to review the situation as a matter of urgency.

Recommended Actions

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses given below:

- expressing concern about the death on 4 May 1992 of Sufyan Hamoud Muhammad 'Affan who appears to have been without medical treatment until his hospitalization in February 1992 (please state date of arrest and place of imprisonment)
- asking whether a post-mortem investigation was carried out
- seeking information on his state of health at the time of hospitalization and on the cause of death
- raising the case of Mahdi 'Abdu Haydara al-Salimi who had been held in Dhahran Central Prison and is reported to have died on 16 April 1992; asking for information on the state of his health prior to his death and on the cause of his death
- raising the issue of the provision of health care in prisons, acknowledging the problems of the provision of health care generally, but noting that insufficient funds appear to be available for medicines and diagnostic tests in prisons

- urging that the government consider as a matter of urgency improving health care in prisons to prevent any further unnecessary suffering and death

Addresses

His Excellency
 General 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih
 Chairman of the Presidential Council
 Sana'a
 The Republic of Yemen
Telegrams: President 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen
Faxes: + 967 1 262 017
Teleexs: 2422 RI'AS'AH YE

His Excellency
 Dr Muhammad 'Ali Muqbil
 Minister of Public Health
 Ministry of Public Health
 'Altahrir Square
 Sana'a
 Republic of Yemen
Teleexs: 3281 MOH YE

His Excellency
 Ghaleb al-Qumzsh
 Minister of the Interior
 Ministry of the Interior
 Sana'a
 Republic of Yemen