

URGENT ACTION

YEMENI JOURNALIST ABDUCTED

A male Yemeni journalist, Muhammad al-Maqalih, has been abducted in the capital, Sana'a, after criticizing the government over continuing armed clashes in Sa'da province, northern Yemen. Muhammad al-Maqalih's whereabouts are unknown, and his life is at risk.

Muhammad al-Maqalih, a 49-year-old father of seven children, was abducted from a street in Sana'a at 11pm on 17 September. Eyewitnesses told his family that he was taken by a group of men who arrived in a white minibus, which had its licence plates obscured. The men took Muhammad al-Maqalih, and deflated one of the tyres on his car, which was nearby. There has been no news of Muhammad al-Maqalih since.



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Muhammad al-Maqalih is a journalist and a member of the Yemeni Socialist Party. Human rights activists in Yemen suspect that he may have been abducted by plain-clothes security forces personnel because of his criticism of the government, in particular with regards to the clashes between the army and followers of a Shi'a Muslim cleric in Sa'da. His comments criticizing the army's killing of civilians were published on the

Yemeni Socialist Party's website (<http://www.aleshteraki.net>).

Abduction of political opponents and critics of the state by security agents is a known practice in Yemen, particularly during political crises such as the clashes in Sa'da. Those abducted are often tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to clarify Muhammed al-Maqalih's whereabouts and to release him without delay if he is being held solely for his criticism of the government;
- Noting that, if this is the case, Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience;
- If Muhammed al-Maqalih is held on suspicion of a recognizably criminal offence, urging the authorities to ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and allowed prompt and regular access to lawyers of his choosing, his family and any medical treatment that he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 OCTOBER 2009 TO:

President
 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh
 Office of the President of the Republic
 of Yemen
 Sana'a
 Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 127 4147
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior
 Mutaher Rashad al Masri
 Ministry of the Interior
 Sana'a
 Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 332 511
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Minister of Human Rights
 Houda 'Ali 'Abdullatif al-Baan
 Ministry for Human Rights
 Sana'a
 Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 444 833
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Yemen accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In Yemen, critics of the state are often at risk of arrest, detention, abduction and beatings.

Yemen's Sa'da region, whose inhabitants are predominantly members of the country's Zaidi Shi'ia Muslim minority, has experienced several periods of conflict in recent years. There have been a number of armed clashes between government security forces and followers of the late Zaidi Shi'ia cleric, Hussein al-Houthi, who was killed in 2004. The latest surge in violence began in mid-August, when the area was placed under a virtual state of emergency. Government forces have mounted a series of attacks, including bombing raids against villages and towns, in an apparent attempt to crush Hussein al-Houthi's supporters.

International humanitarian law expressly prohibits attacks which directly target civilians, indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. The Yemeni government and the Houthi armed militants are legally bound to respect international humanitarian law and must ensure that their forces refrain from carrying out such unlawful attacks.

Amnesty International has called on the Yemeni authorities to investigate, fully and promptly, all allegations of serious violations by their forces. This includes a reported bombing raid on 16 September at Adi village in the Harf Sufyan area of Amran province near Sa'da, which is said to have killed about 80 civilians.

For more information see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/saudi-arabia-must-assist-refugees-fleeing-yemen-fighting-20090918>

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