

URGENT ACTION

ANOTHER 20 ACTIVISTS SENTENCED TO PRISON

Twenty activists in Oman have been sentenced in August to prison on charges related solely to the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. If they are imprisoned, Amnesty International will consider them prisoners of conscience.

A court in the capital, Muscat, on 8 August 2012, sentenced 11 activists each to a year's imprisonment and a fine of 200 Riyals (around US\$520) for participating in a peaceful protest. A twelfth man, **Usama Aal Tawayya**, received a one-year prison sentence for insulting the Sultan. The 12, whom Amnesty International would consider prisoners of conscience if they were sent to jail, were released on bail on 11 August and will be appealing. Among them are prominent activists **Sa'eed al-Hashimi**, **Basimah al-Rajhi** and lawyer **Basma al-Kiyumi**.

Muscat's court of first instance had sentenced eight other men on 6 August 2012 to one year's imprisonment and a fine of 1000 Riyal (around US\$2,600) on charges including insulting the Sultan and using the internet to publish defamatory material. They were also released on bail and will be appealing. Among them were **Ahmed al-Ma'ammari**, and **Awad al-Sawafi**. A woman on trial with them was acquitted.

At least 12 other people are still detained, with the next trial session scheduled for 26 August 2012. They include **Ismail al-Muqbali**, **Nabhan al-Habshi**, and **Mukhtar al-Hinai**.

In July 2012 at least seven activists had been sentenced to imprisonment on similar charges: they have been released on bail pending appeals. Trials began after a string of arrests of writers, activists and bloggers in late May and early June 2012. So far at least 35 people have been sentenced or are standing trial in relation to the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

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

- Calling on the authorities of Oman to release, immediately and unconditionally, all detainees held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, as Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience;
- Calling on them to drop all charges, and quash all convictions, related solely to the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Urging them to ensure that any legal proceedings in these cases conform to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 SEPTEMBER 2012 TO:

Head of State and Prime Minister

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id Al
Said

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

Mr Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Riyami

National Human Rights Commission

P.O. Box 29, Postal Code: 103

Bareq A' Shati

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Fax: +968 24 648 801

Email: enquiry@nhrc.om

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 174/12. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde20/001/2012> and <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde20/002/2012>

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



Basma al-Kiyumi © Private

Protests in Oman in January and February 2011, sparked by popular unrest across the Middle East and North Africa, led to a number of government measures. In response to protesters' demands, on 27 February 2011, Oman's head of state, Sultan Qaboos, ordered the creation of 50,000 jobs and 150 Omani riyals a month (about US\$390) in benefits for the unemployed. On 7 March, Sultan Qaboos reshuffled and restructured the cabinet, sacking a number of ministers.

However, the Omani authorities have continued to maintain strict restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly and protests against the authorities have continued intermittently since March 2011. Protesters have voiced the need for greater freedom of the press and for certain current and former ministers to be held to account for offences they are alleged to have committed while in office. Scores of protesters were arrested and many brought to trial in 2011, while at least one man was reported to have died when police forcibly dispersed protesters in the town of Sohar, north of Oman.

The most recent arrests began on 31 May 2012 when three activists were arrested when they tried to travel to Fohoud oil field (about 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 for inciting a protest. Habeeba al-Hina'i and Yaqoub al-Kharousi were released on bail on 4 June, but Ismail al-Muqbali is one of those still detained and facing trial.

Following this, more arrests took place of writers and activists in early June. Shortly after the arrests, the Public Prosecution issued a number of statements, one of them on 4 June saying legal action would be taken against anyone who published "offensive writing" in the media or online that was deemed to be "inciting" others to action "under the pretext of freedom of expression".

Several of the activists arrested in the recent crackdown were previously arrested in 2011. For instance, prominent lawyer Basma al-Kiyumi, who was detained on 11 June 2012 and sentenced on 8 August, had been previously arrested on 14 May 2011 during a peaceful protest in front of the Shura Council in Muscat, along with 14 others, and was released on bail two days later after being charged with participating in an unlawful gathering.

The rights to freedom of expression and assembly are guaranteed under international human rights law and standards. Where restrictions are imposed they must be for certain specific purposes, which include the rights and reputation of others, and must be demonstrably necessary and proportionate and must not put in jeopardy the right itself. Political public figures should tolerate a greater degree of criticism, not less, than people generally, and accordingly, criminal or other laws which provide special protection against criticism for public officials are not consistent with respect for freedom of expression.

See for more information *Omani activists sentenced as crackdown on free speech continues* (17 July 2012) at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/omani-activists-sentenced-crackdown-free-speech-continues-2012-07-17> and *Oman: Intolerance of dissent mounts as a dozen more activists sentenced* (8 August 2012) at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/oman-intolerance-dissent-mounts-dozen-more-activists-sentenced-2012-08-08>

Names: Ahmed al-Ma'ammari (m), Awad al-Sawafi (m), Usama Aal Tawayya (m), Sa'eed al-Hashimi (m), Basimah al-Rajih (f), Basma al-Kiyumi (f), Ismail al-Muqbali (m), Nabhan al-Habshi (m), and Mukhtar al-Hinai (m).

Further information on UA: 174/12 Index: MDE 20/003/2012 Issue Date: 17 August 2012