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Public Statement

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Yemen: Amnesty International calls for investigation of beatings of defence lawyers of Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani

Amnesty International is concerned that defence lawyers Mohammad Naji Allow and Jamal al-Ju'bi together with the Secretary General of the Union of Journalists, Hafez al-Bukari have been subjected to beatings by security forces. The organization calls on the government to carry out an independent and impartial investigation of police behaviour against these and possibly other individuals and bring to justice anyone found responsible for the beatings.

The beatings took place on 1 March 2005 during the appeal hearing of imprisoned editor-in-chief of *al-shura* newspaper Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani who was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in September 2004 in addition to six months suspension of his newspaper. According to eyewitness reports, lawyer Mohammad Naji Allow was forcibly removed from the court room following a disagreement between him and the court presiding judge. He was said to have been badly beaten by security officials and a gun was pointed at him. Other people attending the trial were also said to have been beaten by security officials when they tried to leave the court room in protest against the brutal treatment of Mohammad Naji Allow.

Mohammad Naji Allow is a member of the defence team which has been defending Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani who has been convicted and sentenced on the grounds that his newspaper supported Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi, a cleric from the Zaidi community who was killed by security forces in Sa'da in September 2004. Hundreds, and possibly thousands of his followers were also killed after attacks by government forces which took place between June and September 2004. According to Amnesty International's information Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani has not been charged with violent acts and the organization believes that he may be punished primarily for his peaceful criticism of the security forces attacks and killings of the followers of Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi in Sa'da and as such would be a prisoner of conscience. His appeal hearing has been postponed until 22 March 2005, and pending investigation of the beatings of his lawyers, the government should ensure that they will be able to perform their defence duties without fear of aggression or intimidation by security forces.

