

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST DETAINED INCOMMUNICADO

A male Yemeni journalist, Muhammad al-Maqalih, was abducted in the capital, Sana'a, after criticizing the government over armed clashes in Sa'da province, northern Yemen. Muhammad al-Maqalih is now believed to be detained in the Political Security Prison in Sana'a.



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Muhammad al-Maqalih, a 49-year-old father of seven children, was abducted from a street in Sana'a on 17 September. Eyewitnesses told his family that he was taken by a group of plain-clothed men who arrived in a white minibus, which had its licence plates obscured. Before leaving with Muhammad al-Maqalih the men went to his car and deflated one of the tyres.

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 security forces because of his criticism of the government, in particular with regards to the recent clashes between the army and followers of a Shi'a Muslim cleric in Sa'da that began in mid-August this year. His comments that criticized the army's killing of civilians were published on the Yemeni Socialist Party's website. The human rights activists say they have received information from reliable sources that Muhammad al-Maqalih is being held in the Political Security Prison in Sana'a.

Yemen's Attorney General wrote to the Central Organ for Political Security recently at the request of Marsad (Yemen Human Rights Observatory), a non-governmental organization, requesting that Muhammad al-Maqalih be referred to the prosecution if he is to face charges or released. Amnesty International has also written to them regarding clarification of his whereabouts and his legal status.

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 publicly Muhammad al-Maqalih's whereabouts and to release him immediately and unconditionally 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 Muhammad 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 a lawyer of his choosing, his family and any medical treatment that he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 NOVEMBER 2009 TO:

President

'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh
Office of the President of the Republic
of Yemen
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

Fax: +967 1 274147

Salutation: Your Excellency_

Major General Ghaleb al-Qamash

Chairman of the Central Organ for
Political Security
Central Organ for Political Security
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

Fax: +967 1 443040

Salutation: Dear Sir

And copies to:

Minister of Human Rights

Houda 'Ali 'Abdullatif al-Baan
Ministry for Human Rights
Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

Fax: +967 1 444833

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. This is the first update of UA246/09 (MDE 31/011/2009). Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE31/011/2009/en>

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INTERNATIONAL**



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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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