

URGENT ACTION

YEMEN ANNOUNCES IT IS HOLDING JOURNALIST

Yemen's Minister of Information has announced that the Yemeni authorities are holding journalist Muhammad al-Maqalih. However, the authorities are still refusing to give any information about him, including his whereabouts. He is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.



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Muhammad al-Maqalih was abducted on 17 September, by men in civilian clothes, believed to be from the security forces. 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. In December 2009, the Minister of Information officially announced that the security forces are holding him. It is not clear which security force is holding him or where he is being held, and the reason for his detention is not known.

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 plainclothes security forces personnel because of his criticism of the government, in particular regarding 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>).

Muhammad al-Maqalih's family has staged a number of sit-in protests outside government offices, which have been attended by journalists and the general public. "Provisionally we want the authorities to inform us of his whereabouts and allow us to see him and see how he is," Bilal al-Maqalih, Muhammad al-Maqalih's son told Amnesty International. "Our ultimate demand is that he is released."

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

- √ Calling on the authorities to reveal where and why Muhammed al-Maqalih is being detained;
- √ Noting that if he is being held solely for his criticism of the government, he is a prisoner of conscience, and must be released immediately and unconditionally;
- √ Urging them to ensure that Muhammad al-Maqalih 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 he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 MARCH 2010 TO:

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Mutaher Rashad al-Masri
Ministry of Interior
Sana'a
Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 332 511 /
+967 1 514 532 / +967 1 331 899
Email: moi@yemen.net.ye
Salutation: Your Excellency

President

His Excellency 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh
Office of the President of the Republic
of Yemen
Sana'a
Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 274 147
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Human Rights
Her Excellency Dr Houda 'Ali 'Abdullatif al-Baan
Ministry for Human Rights
Sana'a
Republic of Yemen
Fax: +967 1 444 838/
+967 1 419 555 / +967 1 419 700
Email: mshr@y.net.ye

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 third update of UA 246/09 (MDE 31/011/2009) see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE31/011/2009/en>, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE31/013/2009/en> and <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE31/015/2009/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

Yemen's Sa'da region, whose inhabitants are predominantly members of the country's Zaidi Shi'a Muslim minority, has experienced several periods of conflict in recent years. The security forces have clashed several times with followers of Zaidi Shi'a 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 armed followers of Zaidi Shi'a cleric Hussein al-Houthi 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, including 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 Amnesty International's press release *Yemen: Saudi Arabia must assist refugees fleeing Sa'da fighting* of 17 September 2009 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/yemen-saudi-arabia-must-assist-refugees-fleeing-sa%E2%80%99da-fighting-20090917>).

Further information on UA: 246/09 Index: MDE 31/003/2010 Issue Date: 19 January 2010.

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