

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 31/006/2007

29 June 2007

UA 169/07 **Fear of torture/Medical concern/possible prisoner of conscience**

YEMEN **Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani (m), journalist**

Journalist Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani was arrested on 20 June, and is at risk of torture and ill-treatment. He appears to be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for his peaceful criticism of the government. He suffers from a heart condition, but the authorities have refused to allow him any medical attention.

Plainclothes National Security Forces officers reportedly stormed his home in Sana'a, dragged him from his bed and assaulted him, causing bruising. He is held at the Precautionary Detention Prison in Sana'a, Yemen's capital, where his lawyer has not been allowed to see him. On 25 June his detention was renewed for a month, without his lawyer being present.

Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani, a former editor-in-chief of the newspaper *al-Shura*, has reportedly been charged with supporting followers of Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi, a Zaidi cleric who led anti-US protests and who was killed in September 2004. It appears however that he may have been arrested for his outspoken criticism of the mass arrests of members of the Zaidi community carried out by the Yemeni authorities and the killings of suspected followers of Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi by Yemeni security forces. Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani has been a longstanding leading critic of human rights violations committed against members of the Zaidi community. He is expected to stand trial at the Specialised Criminal Court in Yemen, whose proceedings often fall short of international standards for fair trial.

Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani was previously arrested in 2004 and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment on the grounds that his newspaper supported Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi. His lawyers were beaten by the security forces during an appeal hearing in March 2005. He was released in 2005.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has repeatedly raised its concerns regarding detentions by the Yemeni security forces, which are carried out with total disregard for the rule of law and for Yemen's international human rights obligations. Arrests are carried out without the judicial supervision required by law and those detained are invariably subjected to lengthy incommunicado detention and interrogations, during which some detainees claim that they have been tortured or ill-treated. Detainees have also been denied access to lawyers, and given no opportunity to challenge the legality of their detention before a court.

Longstanding tensions between the Shi'a Zaidi community and the Yemeni government were heightened by protests by the Shi'a Zaidi community during the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. During and after the invasion, members of the Zaidi community carried on the protests after Friday prayers every week outside mosques, particularly the Grand Mosque in Sana'a, during which they shouted anti-US and anti-Israeli slogans. The protests were invariably followed by arrests. In June 2004 the government called on Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi, one of those leading the criticism of the US-led invasion, to hand himself over to the authorities. When he refused, tension between the two sides escalated into armed clashes, and in September that year, Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi was killed.

The tension erupted again in January 2007, when dozens of people were reportedly killed, including members of the security forces. Hundreds are reported to have been detained following the violence in January 2007 (see UA 29/07, MDE 31/001/2007, 7 February 2007).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or English or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to release Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani immediately and unconditionally if he is held solely for his peaceful criticism of the government;
- expressing concern that Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani was assaulted during arrest, and is now held incommunicado, putting him at risk of torture;
- calling on the authorities to give him immediate access to his lawyer, and any medical attention he may require, and asking for details of the charges against him and when he will be brought to trial;
- seeking urgent assurances that Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani is not being tortured or ill-treated;
- reminding the authorities that they are bound by international standards for fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency General 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh
President of the Republic of Yemen
Sana'a
Republic of Yemen

Fax: + 967 127 4147

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Dr Rashid Muhammad al-Alimi
Ministry of Interior
Sana'a
Republic of Yemen

Fax: + 967 1 332 511

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Human Rights

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

Faxes: + 967 1 444 838

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Yemen accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 August 2007.