

ADVOCACY DOSSIER

AHMED ISSA QATAN

أحمد عيسى قطن

At liberty **Oman**

An environmental rights defender and desalination specialist who opposed ministerial decrees threatening the Dhofar Plain's natural heritage, Dr. Qatan was detained after tweeting his objections to plans that would replace camel-grazing land with residential complexes. He was sentenced in March 2021 to six months in prison and a fine, and was arrested again in August 2022 and released on bail.

HuMENA.

Prepared by HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement · 8 November 2026

Case reference HM-OM-2026-048

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THE CASE AT A GLANCE

An environmental rights defender and desalination specialist who opposed ministerial decrees threatening the Dhofar Plain's natural heritage, Dr. Qatan was detained after tweeting his objections to plans that would replace camel-grazing land with residential complexes. He was sentenced in March 2021 to six months in prison and a fine, and was arrested again in August 2022 and released on bail.

STATUS	**At liberty**
ARRESTED	**4 Aug 2022**
COUNTRY	**Oman**
SENTENCE	**Six months in prison and a fine of 1,000 Omani riyals (Salalah Court of First Instance, 31 March 2021); appeal outcome not known.**
CHARGES	**Using social media in a way that would prejudice public order (article 19, Cybercrime Law)**

WE CALL ON THE AUTHORITIES TO:

WHAT WE ASK

01 Quash the conviction and drop any charges that remain on record against Ahmed Issa Qatan in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Ahmed Issa Qatan faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Ahmed Issa Qatan can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

04 Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

Latest updates on this case
Scan the code or visit:
https://humena.org/defenders/ahmed-issa-qatan/

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DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS

	INTERNATIONAL STANDARD
Arbitrary detention	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9
Denial of legal counsel	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)
Judicial harassment	UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

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HOW THE CASE UNFOLDED

23 February 2021

ARREST

Arrested upon summoning to Salalah Police

Ahmed Issa Qatan was arrested by the Internal Security Service when he arrived at the Special Division of the Salalah Police Command, where he had been summoned to appear. He was denied access to his lawyer during interrogation.

24 February 2021

CHARGE FILED

Charged and remanded for two weeks

The Public Prosecutor charged Qatan with using social media in a manner prejudicial to public order, under article 19 of the Cybercrime Law, and ordered him held in pre-trial detention for two weeks at the Dhofar Governorate Police Command detention centre in Salalah.

8 March 2021

CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Released on bail by the Salalah court

The Salalah Court of First Instance ordered his release on bail until his next court appearance, set for 17 March 2021.

31 March 2021

CONVICTION

Sentenced to six months in prison and a fine

The Salalah Court of First Instance sentenced Qatan to six months in prison and a fine of 1,000 Omani riyals under the cybercrime law. He was allowed to appeal on payment of 500 riyals.

4 August 2022

RE-ARREST

Re-arrested by the Internal Security Service over his online posts

The Internal Security Service arrested Qatan again over his online posts, including a tweet calling for reforms.

16 August 2022

CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Released on bail

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THE FULL STORY

Background and Work

Ahmed Issa Qatan is an environmental rights defender and technical specialist in seawater desalination. His professional background gave him a detailed understanding of the Dhofar Plain's ecological systems, the coastal stretch in southern Oman where desert, grassland, and ocean converge. For years he advocated publicly for the preservation of green areas and natural heritage in the Dhofar Governorate, particularly the protection of land used for traditional camel grazing and the conservation of biodiversity in the region.

Qatan's activism centred on transparency and environmental accountability. He used social media, particularly Twitter, to educate the public about the ecological consequences of development policies and to challenge government decisions that he believed threatened the region's natural heritage.

The Ministerial Decree and Public Advocacy

In early 2021, Mohammed Bin Sultan Bin Hamoud Al-Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, issued a decree that included a ban on camel grazing in parts of the Dhofar Plain. The stated purpose was to facilitate construction of residential complexes. The decree triggered immediate concern among environmental advocates and pastoralist communities who viewed the plain as both ecologically fragile and culturally significant.

Qatan responded with a series of tweets from his personal account. He outlined the environmental importance of the coastal plain, critiqued the transfer of land to housing projects, and urged the authorities to annul the decree. His posts were technical in tone, grounded in his expertise, and framed as a call for policy reversal rather than personal criticism.

Arrest and Charges

On 23 February 2021, Qatan was summoned to appear at the Special Division of the Salalah Police Command. When he arrived, officers of the Internal Security Service arrested him. During subsequent interrogations, he was denied access to legal counsel.

The following day, 24 February, the Public Prosecutor formally charged him with "using social media in a way that would prejudice public order." He was ordered held in pre-trial detention for two weeks at the detention centre of the Dhofar Governorate Police Command's Directorate of Criminal Inquiries and Investigation in Salalah. The charge was based entirely on his Twitter posts concerning the ministerial decree.

Legal Proceedings

On 8 March 2021 the Salalah Court of First Instance released him on bail. On 31 March 2021 the same court sentenced him to six months in prison and a fine of 1,000 Omani riyals. On 4 August 2022 the Internal Security Service arrested him again over online posts, including a tweet calling for reforms, and he was released on bail on 16 August 2022. The legal basis for the charge, Oman's broad provisions criminalising speech deemed harmful to public order, has been used repeatedly against activists, journalists, and critics of government policy.

The denial of access to his lawyer during the initial interrogation violated fair-trial guarantees. The two-week remand order, issued immediately after charges were filed, extended his detention without judicial review of the necessity or proportionality of custody.

Context and Patterns

Qatan's detention followed a well-established pattern in Oman of using vague national-security and public-order provisions to criminalise peaceful dissent. Environmental defenders, in particular, have faced judicial harassment when their advocacy challenges state-sponsored development projects or exposes ecological harm linked to government policy.

The case also illustrates the narrowing space for civil society criticism in Oman. By 2021, social media had become one of the few remaining platforms for public debate, and authorities responded by expanding surveillance and prosecution of online speech. Qatan's arrest for tweets about land use and environmental policy underscored the state's unwillingness to tolerate even technical, policy-focused critique.

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SAMPLE LETTER

Copy it, adapt it and send it from your own address.

Your Excellency,

I am writing about the case of Ahmed Issa Qatan, environmental rights defender and desalination specialist; advocate for preservation of green areas and natural heritage in the Dhofar Plain in Oman, who has been released. I am writing to ask that the case be closed properly and that no further reprisal follows.

In brief: An environmental rights defender and desalination specialist who opposed ministerial decrees threatening the Dhofar Plain's natural heritage, Dr. Qatan was detained after tweeting his objections to plans that would replace camel-grazing land with residential complexes. He was sentenced in March 2021 to six months in prison and a fine, and was arrested again in August 2022 and released on bail.

I respectfully urge your authorities to:
1. Quash the conviction and drop any charges that remain on record against Ahmed Issa Qatan in connection with peaceful human rights work;
2. Confirm publicly that Ahmed Issa Qatan faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case;
3. Guarantee that Ahmed Issa Qatan can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal;
4. Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

I will continue to follow this case until the record against Ahmed Issa Qatan is cleared and no reprisal remains.

Respectfully,

[Your name]
[Your city, country]
8 November 2026