Yemen: Over 150 NGOs appeal for death sentences of four journalists to be overturned

Joint Statements · Yemen · 12 May 2020

Organisations which support human rights, press freedom and journalists are calling on United Nations mechanisms and member states to help save the lives of four Yemeni journalists who were sentenced to death in April 2020 in the capital Sana'a on charges of "spying" and "spreading false news." Of the six other journalists in the same case whom the judge ordered to be freed, after five years in detention, only one has been released so far. The *de facto* authorities in Sana'a, the Houthis, must immediately overturn the death sentences and free the other nine journalists who have been convicted in violation of their right to freedom of expression.

We recently celebrated World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 2020. Journalism, especially independent and critical journalism, is vital to promote transparency accountability, good governance and respect for human rights and the rule of law. Journalists are in no way actors in the conflict in Yemen and cannot be targeted under any circumstances.

The four journalists, **Abdulkhaleq Ahmed Amran**, **Akram Saleh Al-Walidi**, **Al-Hareth Saleh Hamid** and **Tawfiq Mohammed Al-Mansouri** were convicted on 11 April 2020 by the Specialised Criminal Court in Sana'a, which is controlled by the Houthis. Their lawyer Abdelmajeed Sabra, who was denied access to the verdict hearing, began the appeals process on 22 April 2020.

The judge sentenced the other six journalists, **Hisham Ahmed Tarmoom**, **Hisham Abdulmalik Al-Yousefi**, **Haitham Abdulrahman Al-Shihab**, **Essam Amin Balgheeth**, **Hassan Abdullah Annab** and **Salah Muhammad Al-Qaedi**, to time already served in prison, or approximately five years, and also placed them under police supervision for a period of another three years. In addition, the electronic devices and materials that were in their possession when they were arrested remain confiscated.

The Public Prosecution had demanded that the maximum penalties be directed against them according to Articles 16, 21, 126 second, and 136 of the Penal Code (Law No. 12 of 1994 on crimes and penalties).

The journalists were charged with spreading false news "in support of the crimes of Saudi aggression and its allies against the Republic of Yemen." The journalists were also accused of "harming the public interest by setting up several websites and pages on the Internet and social networks and running them in secret in several hotels in the capital, Sana'a." The Saudi-led coalition has been fighting a war against the Houthis in Yemen since 2015.

On 9 June 2015, a group of Houthi forces arrested nine of the journalists while they were using the

Internet at the Qasr Al-Ahlam hotel in Sana'a. Salah Mohammad Al-Qaedi was later detained at his home in Sana'a by Houthi forces on 28 August 2015. They were arbitrarily detained, held in solitary confinement at length, tortured and mistreated while in captivity, and were not formally charged until more than three years later. In December 2018, fabricated charges were issued against them related to their peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of opinion and expression in a show trial that violated international fair trial and due process standards.

Meanwhile, despite the court's decision to release the six journalists, the authorities continue to delay their release. Until the date of this appeal, only journalist Salah Mohammad Al-Qaedi has been released (on 23 April 2020).

The undersigned organisations call on all the parties to the conflict to uphold the right to freedom of expression and cease their efforts to muzzle journalists and media organisations.

We, the undersigned, call on the United Nations, specifically the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen, and UN Members states, such as the United Kingdom and Canada, who co-chair the Media Freedom Coalition of 35 states, to request the *de facto* authorities in Sana'a, the Houthis, to:

1. Overturn the sentences against the ten journalists, particularly the death sentences imposed on journalists Abdulkhaleq Ahmed Amran, Akram Saleh Al-Walidi, Al-Hareth Saleh Hamid and Tawfiq Mohammed Al-Mansouri, and release them immediately;
2. Immediately free journalists Hisham Ahmed Tarmoom, Hisham Abdulmalik Al-Yousefi, Haitham Abdulrahman Al-Shihab, Essam Amin Balgheeth, and Hassan Abdullah Annab, following the court's order to release them on 11 April 2020, and ensure they are not subjected to further judicial measures to restrict their work;
3. Free all detained and disappeared Yemeni journalists, and drop all charges against them;
4. Make every effort to ensure the safety and physical integrity of journalists – in accordance with customary international humanitarian law; and
5. Ensure that journalists are able to carry out their work without fear of arrest or other forms of reprisals and restrictions that violate their right to freedom of expression.

————————————-

Signed,

– Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran

– Abductees' Mothers Association

– ACAT-Belgique /Belgium/ Belgie

– ACAT-Côte d'Ivoire

– ACAT-España/ Catalunya

- ACAT-Germany (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)
- ACAT-Italia
- ACAT-Switzerland
- ACAT-USA
- Access Center For Human Rights (ACHR)
- Access Now
- Ahmed Tlili’s Foundation for Democratic Culture
- Al-Aalem Al-Jadeed
- Al-Haq – Palestine
- Al-Mustaqbal Association
- Al-Wed Development Foundation
- Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH)
- ALQST for Human Rights
- Amarchi Center for Media Development
- Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
- Amman Center for Human Rights Studies
- Arab Coalition against the Death Penalty
- Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR), Syria
- Arab Women Organisation of Jordan (AWO)
- Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
- ARTICLE 19
- Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc
- Association for Citizenship, Development, Cultures and Migrations of the Two Banks (CDCMIR)
- Association mauritanienne des droits de l’Homme (AMDH)
- Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development
- Association of Tunisian Women Voters
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

- Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights
- Center for Civil Liberties, Ukraine
- Center for Constitutional Rights
- Center for Democracy and Civil Rights in Syria
- CIVICUS
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
- Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide
- Dameer Association for Rights and Freedoms
- Death Penalty Focus, USA
- Democratic Transition and Human Rights Support Center (DAAM)
- El-Nadim Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence
- Electronic Organization for Humanitarian Media
- English PEN
- Ethical Possibility Enhancement (EPE) Movement
- FIDH
- For Your Sake Foundation
- Free Press Unlimited
- Free Sight Association
- Freedom Forum
- Freedom Now, Morocco
- Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties
- German Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (GCADP)
- Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)
- Global Voices Advox
- Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
- Hands Off
- Human Rights Sentinels

- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- IFEX
- Impunity Watch
- Initiative Mawjoudin pour l’égalité
- Inmates’ Voices / Voix de détenus – Switzerland
- Innovation for Change Middle East and North Africa
- International Association of People’s Lawyers (IAPL)
- International Campaign for Freedom in the UAE (ICFUAE)
- International Center for Supporting Rights and Freedoms, Switzerland
- International Commission of Journalists (ICJ)
- International Federation for Rights and Development (IFRD)
- International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
- International Media Support (IMS)
- International Press Institute (IPI)
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- Irada Association for Community Development
- Iraqi Al Amal Association
- Iraqi Network for Social Media (INSM)
- Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights (IOHR)
- Italian Federation for Human Rights (FIDU)
- Jordanian Coalition against the Death Penalty
- Joud Foundation for Sustainable Development – Yemen
- Journalistic Freedoms Observatory
- Karama Academy for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, Algeria
- Kenya Human Rights Commission
- Lawyers’ Rights Watch Canada
- Legal Awareness Watch (LAW)

- Lifespark (Movement against the death penalty) Switzerland
- MADA-Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms
- MADPET-Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture
- Maghreb Coordination of Human Rights Organizations
- Maharat Foundation
- Mahra Youth Unity Association
- Maison des Droits de l'Homme du Cameroun (MDHC)
- MENA Rights Group
- Metro Center for Journalists Rights & Advocacy
- Moroccan Association for Human Rights (ADMH)
- Moroccan Association for the Protection of Cultural Manuscripts
- Moroccan Coalition Against the Death Penalty
- Moroccan Coalition for Human Rights Organisations
- Musaala for Human Rights Organization
- Mwatana for Human Rights
- National Center for Peace and Development
- National Observatory for the Defense of the Civil Character of the State
- No Peace Without Justice
- Norwegian PEN
- Omani Centre for Human Rights
- Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF)
- Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR)
- Peace and Building Foundation
- Peace Partners
- PEN America
- PEN Canada
- PEN International

- PEN Iraq
- Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
- Press Freedom Advocacy Association in Iraq
- Promo LEX Association Moldova
- Protection Organisation for Digital Rights, Iraq
- Qarar Foundation for Media and Sustainable Development
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- Reprieve
- Rights Realization Centre
- Rory Peck Trust
- SAM for Rights and Liberties
- Samir Kassir Foundation – SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom
- Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies
- Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF)
- Sky Line International for Human Rights
- Syndicat national des agents de la formation et de l'éducation du Niger (SYNAFEN)
- Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research
- Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
- Syrian Organization for Rights and Public Freedoms
- Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ)
- The Advocates for Human Rights
- Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM)
- Tunis Center for Press Freedom
- Tunisian Association for the Right to the Promotion of Difference (ATPDD)
- Tunisian Association of Democratic Women
- Tunisian Association of Positive Prevention (ATP+)
- Tunisian Coalition Against the Death Penalty (CTCPM)

- Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH)
- Vigilance for Democracy and the Civic State
- Witness to Innocence
- Wogood Foundation for Human Security
- Women Defenders of Rights, Freedoms and Sustainable Development, Yemen
- Women Prisoners Association in Syria
- Women’s Studies Centre, Palestine
- World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA)
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
- Yemen Archive
- Yemeni Women Journalists Network
- Youth Ideas Initiative

Published at https://humena.org/yemen-over-150-ngos-appeal-for-death-sentences-of-four-journalists-to-be-overturned/
HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement · info@humena.org