



STATEMENT

For immediate release – 11 June 2008

Yemen: ARTICLE 19 condemns the decision to sentence the prominent editor Al-Khaiwani to six years in prison

ARTICLE 19 is deeply concerned by the Yemeni State Security Court's verdict sentencing editor in chief of *Al Shoura*, Abdelkarim Al-Khaiwani, to six years in prison.

"We are saddened by the decision to imprison Mr. Al-Khaiwani. We believe the verdict may be politically motivated and call on the appellate courts to allow an appeal of this verdict and guarantee a fair trial", said Dr. Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

Editor Abdelkarim Al-Khaiwani has been regularly targeted by the authorities and was arrested and charged in 2004, 2006 and 2007. These judicial proceedings are the latest and most serious in a long series of cases brought against the Editor. Editor Al-Khaiwani is being tried as a terror suspect rather than for a publishing crime for writing about the war in Sa'ada province.

Al-Khaiwani has already been sentenced to one year's imprisonment for publication of false news, insulting the President, incitement and causing sectarian discrimination in September 2004. The accusations came after he criticised the government's handling of the conflict in Sa'ada province which, he argued, fostered terrorism. He was released in March 2005 under a presidential amnesty.

In a meeting with ARTICLE 19 staff in August 2007, Al-Khaiwani said the reason he has been targeted recently was for "attempting to raise the ceiling of freedoms." "They mobilise religion, laws and even the tribe against us. We, on the other hand, only own our dreams. They even want to rob us of this," he said.

Given the previous harassment to which he has been subject, there are strong suspicions that the charges are politically motivated.

Moreover, the sentence raises serious questions about Yemen's commitment to the protection of human rights. This commitment was set out clearly in the National Reform Agenda, adopted by the government in 2006. Yemen has also ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as well as the Arab Charter on Human Rights, and is therefore obligated as a matter of international law to respect the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed under Article 19 of the ICCPR and the right to a fair trial as guaranteed under Article 14 of the ICCPR.

We therefore call on Yemen to reaffirm its commitment to democratic reforms and respect for human rights, including the right to freedom of expression of media professionals and the right to a fair trial, and to allow for an appeal of the verdict.

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.