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<http://www.rsf.org/oman-concern-about-prisoners-of-14-02-2013,44078.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Oman

Critical condition

Concern about prisoners of conscience on hunger strike

14 February 2013

[In Arabic \(بالعربية\)](#)

At least 17 detainees in Muscat's Samayel prison began a hunger strike on 9 February and other detainees have since joined them. [According to the Monitor of Human Rights in Oman](#), a total of 23 detainees who regard themselves as prisoners of conscience are currently refusing to eat. Six who are in a critical condition were taken to various hospitals in the capital yesterday.

The hunger strikers, who are serving sentences ranging from six to 18 months in prison, are protesting against their detention and the time being taken by the supreme court to examine their appeals, said Yaqoob Al-Harith, a lawyer who represents seven of the 17 original hunger strikers.

They include political activists, free speech activists and civil society representatives who were convicted of cyber-crimes, violating communication regulations, illegal assembly and insulting Sultan Qaboos on online social networks.

While never supporting hunger strikes, Reporters Without Borders is very concerned about the health of the hunger strikers, especially those who have been hospitalized, and reiterates its call for the immediate release of all those held on lèse-majesté and cyber-crime charges and for the quashing for their convictions. The international community must press the Omani government to stop gagging civil society.

Relatives of the detainees and a number of prominent local and national figures yesterday called on the Omani authorities to free all the detainees and appealed to Omani and international public opinion to support this call.

Relatives of many detainees wrote to the National Human Rights Commission on 10 February urging it to intervene to stop the mistreatment.

[On 16 January, a Muscat appeal court upheld the jail sentences imposed on eight writers and bloggers.](#)

The authorities reacted to the start of the hunger strike by searching the detainees' cells and transferring **Saeed Al-Hachimi**, a well-known writer regarded as the ringleader, to a high-security prison.
