

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/jordan-journalist-to-be-tried-before-25-04-2012,42354.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Jordan

Sword of Damocles

Journalist freed on bail after 21 days in custody, still faces prosecution

14 May 2012

Reporters Without Borders is relieved at the release on bail yesterday of **Jamal Al-Muhtaseb**, who had been held in custody since 23 April charged with "inciting anti-government sentiment".

However the press freedom organization added: "We can only regret that his release after 21 days in custody remains conditional and the charges still stand.

"In addition, we stress that the prosecution of a journalist before a military court is unlawful. Such a procedure is contrary to the Jordanian constitution and to international commitments to which the Jordanian state is a signatory. We ask the authorities to drop the charges against Jamal Al-Muhtaseb immediately."

The prosecutor at the state security court ordered the release of Muhtaseb, editor of the *Gerasa News* website and the *Al-Mir'aa* weekly newspaper, on bail of 5,000 dinars (about 5,300 euros). Media workers had held demonstrations in Amman on 11 May to support demands for his release.

The charge against Muhtaseb, which carries a possible 15-year jail sentence, was prompted by an article quoting an unnamed parliamentarian as saying parliament had received royal directives not to indict former government minister Sahil Majali for alleged corruption in connection with the "Sakan Karim" low-income housing project.

Fellow *Gerasa News* journalist **Sahar Al-Muhtaseb**, who faces the same charges, was also released on bail of the same amount.

Under Jordanian law, these proceedings are unlawful and without foundation. Article 101 of the Hashemite Kingdom's constitution specifically prohibits the trial of any civilian by a military court, except on charges of high treason, espionage or drug trafficking.

25.04.2012 - Journalist to be tried before state security court for corruption case coverage

Reporters Without Borders calls on the Jordanian authorities to free journalist **Jamal Al-Muhtaseb** at once and to drop plans to try him before a military-run state security court in connection with his coverage of a corruption investigation. The editor of the *Gerasa News* website and the *Al-Mir'aa* weekly newspaper, Muhtaseb has been held since 23 April.

"Muhtaseb's detention is a serious violation of Jordanian law and freedom of information." Reporters Without Borders said. "His reporting of this corruption case has been in the public interest. The illegal and arbitrary proceedings brought against him are indicative of the royal family's inability to accept being criticized or challenged. We call for his immediate release and the withdrawal of all the charges."

Muhtaseb has been put in pre-trial detention in Amman's Juweida prison for an initial period of 14 days on a charge of "inciting anti-government sentiment," which carries a possible 15-year jail sentence.

His arrest was prompted by an article quoting an unnamed parliamentarian as saying parliament had received royal directives not to indict former government minister Sahil Majali for alleged corruption in connection with the "Sakan Karim" low-income housing project.

According to *Agence France-Presse*, this gigantic project was launched in 2008 with an initial budget of 7 billion dollars with the aim of building 100,000 homes for low-income Jordanians. Muhtaseb has been alleging high-level government corruption involving Majali.

Using a state security court to try a journalist is completely illegal under Jordanian law and is indicative of the government's nervousness and determination to suppress freedom of information in this affair. Article 101, paragraph 2 of the Hashemite kingdom's constitution specifically bans trying a civilian before a military court on any charge other than high treason, spying or drug trafficking. But challenging the monarchy is clearly a red line that Jordan's press cannot cross.

Gerasa News reported yesterday that the state security court had deferred until today any decision on Muhtaseb's possible release on bail. The court gave no explanation for the postponement. *Gerasa News* reporter **Sahar Al-Muhtaseb**, who has also been charged in the same case, was released after she paid 5,000 dinars (5,300 euros) in bail.

Gerasa News was the victim of a cyber-attack on the night of 23 April, when users hacked into the website and deleted articles about Muhtaseb's arrest and the charges brought against him.

Around 50 journalists staged a sit-in outside the Jordan Press Association building on 23 April to protest against the use of a state security court to try Muhtaseb and to demand his immediate release. They repeated the sit-in yesterday morning and then demonstrated outside parliament in the afternoon.

You can download those documents on our website :

- Journalist to be tried before state security court for corruption case coverage - In Arabic, (PDF - 44.8 kb)
 - Journalist freed on bail after 21 days in custody, still faces prosecution - In arabic, (PDF - 183.8 kb)
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