

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/bahrain-co-founder-of-independent-18-04-2011,40037.html>

Middle East & North Africa - Syria

Death in detention

Co-founder of independent newspaper dies in custody in Bahrain, some journalists freed in Syria and Libya

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Reporters Without Borders hails the release of the Syrian blogger **Wassim Hassan** by the authorities in Damascus. He had been held since 14 April.

The press freedom organization also notes the release of the Syrian journalist **Rana Akbani** in Libya. Her family says the Libyan authorities freed her on 14 April. A resident in Libya for the past 15 years or so, Akbani works for the arts and culture section of the Libyan newspaper *Al-Shams*. In the Al-Libya TV interview, which has been posted online (<http://almanaramedia.blogspot.com/2...>), presenter Hala Misrati accuses her of lacking objectivity, lying in her coverage of street demonstrations in Benghazi and of collaborating with foreign countries. (read <http://en.rsf.org/libya-syrian-jour...>)

BAHRAIN

Reporters Without Borders is outraged to learn that **Karim Fakhrawi**, one of the founders of Bahrain's only independent newspaper, *Al-Wasat*, and a member of its board, died in custody on 12 April, one week after his arrest. The exact cause of death has yet to be established.

"A total of four people have now died in custody," Reporters Without Borders said. "Bahrain's authorities are responsible for all these places of detention. They must account for these deaths and respond to the allegations of systematic mistreatment or even torture of detainees. We call for an independent investigation into the exact causes of Fakhrawi's death. Those responsible must be arrested and tried."

A Shiite businessman and member of the opposition party Al-Wefaq, the 49-year-old Fakhrawi, died of kidney failure, according to the authorities, but his family disputes that, insisting that he was in good health at the time of his arrest.

While his body was being taken for burial in the Hooraa district of Manama on 13 April, people removed the clothes to verify the torture allegations. Photos and video posted online show his body covered with cuts and bruises.

Founded in 2002, *Al-Wasat* was banned on 3 April, one day after the national television programme "Media Watch" accused it of trying to harm Bahrain's stability and security and disseminating false information that undermined the country's international image and reputation. The Information Affairs Authority, a government agency that regulates the media, reversed this decision and gave *Al-Wasat* permission to resume publishing on 4 April but three of its most senior journalists were forced to resign and were summoned for questioning by the agency (<http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-no-conces...>).

As previously reported, the netizen **Zakariya Rashid Hassan** died in detention on 9 April, seven days after his arrest on charges of inciting hatred, disseminating false news, promoting sectarianism and calling for the regime's overthrow in online forums. He moderated a now-closed forum (<http://www.aldair.net/forum/>) providing information about his village of origin, Al-Dair. His family has rejected the interior ministry's claim that he died as a result of sickle cell anemia complications (<http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-no-conces...>).

SYRIA

Reporters Without Borders learned today that three Syrian journalists and a blogger have been released by the authorities. They are **Mohamed Dibo**, a journalist and writer who was arrested during a demonstration in Baniyas on 19 March; **Ahmed Hadifa**, a blogger held since 24 March because of his activities on Facebook; **Zaher Omareen**, a journalist held since 27 March; and Amer Matar, a journalist working for *Al-Hayat*. Around 100 demonstrators have also been freed.

The press freedom organization hails their release although there were no grounds for their arbitrary arrests and detention. Many other people remain in detention including journalists. Reporters Without Borders calls for their immediate and unconditional release. It is essential that the authorities lift of the state of emergency and introduce reforms that pave the way for democracy in an effective manner.

The following are still being held arbitrarily: **Khaled Sid Mohand**, an Algerian journalist who was arrested on 9 April; **Fayez Sara**, a Syrian journalist and writer who was arrested on 11 April; **Mohamed Zaid Mistou**, a Norwegian journalist of Syrian origin; and the blogger **Kamal Hussein Sheikou**. The fate of the journalists **Akram Abu Safi** and **Sobhie Naeem Al-Assal**, and the blogger Wassim Hassan is still unknown.

Several UN human rights experts voiced concern today about the rising death toll and appealed to the Syrian authorities to stop the "brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters" at once. They also called for the immediate release of all demonstrators, including journalists, bloggers and human rights activists, who have been arbitrarily detained.

LIBYA

Ammar Al-Hamdane, a Norwegian photographer of Palestinian origin working for the Qatar-based TV station *Al-Jazeera*, was released yesterday. Arrested on 7 March in western Libya with three other *Al-Jazeera* journalists – Mauritanian reporter **Ahmed Vall Ould el-Dine**, Tunisian reporter **Lotfi Messaoudi**, and British photographer **Kamel Ataloua** – he had been accused of cooperating with the Norwegian and Qatari intelligence services.

Messaoudi was freed on 31 March and El-Dine was freed on 11 April. Ataloua is the only one still held. Reporters Without Borders is very concerned about him and reiterates its call for his immediate release.

The exact number of Libyan journalists currently held is still not known.

According to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, the following four journalists, who were arrested on 5 April, are still held: **Clare Morgana Gillis**, a US freelancer who is covering events in the east of the country for *The Atlantic* magazine's website and other US media; **James Foley**, a US reporter working for *GlobalPost.com*, *Stars and Stripes* and *Al-Jazeera*; **Manu Brabo**, a Spanish freelance photographer; and **Anton Hammerl**, a South African freelance photographer.

Lotfi Ghars, a journalist with Tunisian and Canadian dual citizenship working for Al-Alam, has been held since 16 March. **Rana Akbani**, a Syrian woman journalist, has been held since 28 March. **Matthew VanDyke**, an American freelancer, has been missing since 12 March.
