



For immediate release – 13 August 2009

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Yemen: Worrying Violations of Media Freedoms**

**ARTICLE 19 expresses concern about the deteriorating situation for media freedom in Yemen, and increasing incidents of harassment and intimidation of journalists by the authorities in that country.**

In the most recent occurrence, on 12 August, the authorities confiscated copies of *Al Watani* newspaper directly from the printers, allegedly for containing material deemed harmful by the Ministry of Information. Two days earlier, on 10 August, Ayman Mohammed Nasser, editor-in-chief of *Al-Tariq*, received threats for the paper's coverage of events in the south. Nasser, who has been repeatedly questioned by police, is now under serious threat for publishing photos of citizens killed during demonstrations.

Over the past few months, civil unrest was mounting in the south of the country, where citizens have been protesting poor living conditions and the government's failure to deliver on pledges for improved service and infrastructure delivery. Government has recently grown uneasy with the recurrent demonstrations and marches that turn sometimes into intense clashes.

Threats against journalists and intimidation tactics have been frequently employed since the government's clamp-down on the media in May this year, which included an unprecedented suspension of eight independent newspapers. *Al-Ayam*, *Al-Nida*, *Al-Masdar*, *Al-Watani*, *Al-Diyar*, *Al-Share'e*, *Al-Ahali* and *Al-Mustaqilla* were all suspended amid accusation of harming national unity. As many as 200 staff in different media organisations lost income due to these suspensions..

Also in May, the government decided to establish a special court to deal exclusively with press-related offenses, following its discontent with the independent media's coverage of the unrest in the south of Yemen

*"In Yemen, we are seeing a sustained and systematic campaign of harassment against individual journalists and those independent media organizations they work for," says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. "These are not random or unconnected events – the Government of Yemen is using blunt force and a range of legislative tactics to silence voices trying to reveal the truth of ongoing events in the country."*

ARTICLE 19 is monitoring attacks on the media in Yemen and calls on the Government of Yemen to respect freedom of expression and the right of all

newspapers and media outlets to exercise editorial independence. Journalists, editors and all media workers must be protected from threats, intimidation, slander and physical attack, and newspapers must be allowed to publish as normal. ARTICLE 19 also calls on the Government to ensure that the perpetrators of attacks on journalists must be brought to book.

### **Timeline of events: May – July 2009**

**24 May:** The Appeal Court upheld a sentence banning Khalid Salman, *al-Thawri* editor-in-chief, from heading any newspaper for a year and imposed a ban on Naif Hassan, editor-in-chief of *al-Share'e*, preventing him from writing in any newspaper for a year. Salman and Hassan were charged with offending the military institution through their writing.

**25 May:** The Information Ministry confiscated copies of *Al Quds Al Arabi* newspaper for publishing an opinion piece that they claimed jeopardised Yemen's unity.

**12 June:** Journalist Majed al-Jurafi of *Al Ghad* newspaper was attacked near his home by four unidentified people. The attackers stopped al-Jurafi and started beating and insulting him, and then threatened him with death before they stole his bag which contained a laptop computer.

**18 June:** Security forces broke into the house of the editor-in-chief of the Adengulf website, Salah Al-Saqladi. He was abducted and jailed in an unknown location, and his computer and private papers were confiscated.

**20 June:** Mahmoud Taha, a journalist with News Yemen was arrested, although no charges were brought against him.

**23 June:** Fuad Rashid, editor-in-chief of Mukalla Press Website, was arrested during a raid in Al-Mukalla in the province of Hadhramaut. Mukalla was extradited to the Political Security Prison in Sana'a.

**24 June:** Editor-in-chief of *Al-Watani* newspaper, Abdul-Raqib al-Hadiani, was arrested as he was covering an uprising in al-Dhala.

**24 June:** Three Al Jazeera staff were attacked by civilian men during their coverage of a march in support of unification in Yemen.

**27 June:** A report by News Yemen estimated the losses of six newspapers due to suspensions at YER 80 million (about USD 400,000).

**3 July:** Al Manar satellite channel crew were arrested and held for two hours after filming a Somali refugee camp.

**7 July:** Al Jazeera Yemen bureau chief Murad Hashem was held against his will in a hotel and banned from covering demonstrations taking place on that day. Later that month, Hashem also received death threats.

**7 July:** Journalist and photographer Khaled Ben Aqleh was attacked and his camera was confiscated by security forces.

**8 July:** Yemeni authorities confiscated copies of *Al Shoura* newspaper and banned its distribution.

**10 July:** Authorities confiscated 5,000 copies of the independent *Al Watani* newspaper.

**12 July:** Police intercepted a peaceful sit-in in front of, and in solidarity with, the suspended *Al Ayyam* newspaper, arresting 19 staff working there.

**12 July:** Authorities confiscate 5,000 copies of the sixth issue of *Al Qadiyya* newspaper for publishing news and events in the south.

**18 July:** The Special Press Court ordered Muneer Al-Mawri, a US-based Yemeni journalist to stop writing for Yemeni news sources, based on charges of insulting the President of Yemen.

**18 July:** An armed group attacked the editor-in-chief of *Al Shoura* newspaper and beat him until he lost consciousness.

**19 July:** Anis Mansour Hamida of *Al-Ayyam* newspaper was sentenced to one year and two months in prison for “separatism and attacking national unity”. Hamida, charged with sedition, was found guilty after a public prosecutor presented a CD that constituted “material evidence” of Hamida’s peaceful participation in meetings organised by a political group, the Southern Movement.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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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.