



For immediate release – 25 September 2009

Yemen: ARTICLE 19 Calls for Immediate Release of Kidnapped Journalist

Tension is mounting in Yemen with no news on the whereabouts of journalist Mohammed Maqaleh who was abducted on 18 September from Taiz Street in the capital Sana'a.

Maqaleh, writer and editor-in-chief of the opposition socialist news website *Al Ishtiraki*, was abducted last week as he stepped out of his car to check its tyres. His abduction seems to be in response to his allegedly sympathetic coverage of Houthi rebels that are fighting against the ruling authorities in the northern city of Sa'ada.

“ARTICLE 19 expresses real concern on the abduction of Mohammed Maqaleh. This is pure intimidation. He should be immediately released,” says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director

According to his relatives and colleagues, Maqaleh was frequently accused by the government of collaborating, and exchanging information, with the Houthis in northern Yemen, which adds weight to speculations about the authorities being responsible for his abduction.

Fierce battles between the Yemeni army and the followers of Abdulmalik Al-Houthi have been taking place in Sa'ada since 2004 and were renewed early this month during Ramadan. The government accuses the Houthi rebels of trying to install an Islamic Imamate government and has previously described the group as extremist and terrorist. Since the beginning of the fighting, hundreds of people have been killed and thousands displaced. The Houthis claim they have merely been defending themselves and only seek to establish reforms.

Maqaleh's family appealed to the authorities for his release and demanded they disclose his whereabouts, so far with no response. *“We are really worried. It seems to be pre-planned,”* Bilal, son of the journalist Maqaleh, told ARTICLE 19. *“We appeal to the kidnappers to release him as soon as possible.”*

“He is in real danger,” warned Abdel Karim Khaiwani, himself a journalist who has been recurrently imprisoned for his opinions and writings. *“Human rights activists across the globe should stand by Maqaleh's cause and seek his release without delay.”*

Maqaleh, 49, started his journalism career in the early 1990's as chief editor of *Al Umma* newspaper. He is a contributing writer to several weeklies and magazines and is known for his forthright opinions and analysis.

Journalists and activists have staged several demonstrations and sit-ins at the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate calling for his release and for an end to the state of intimidation against journalists and writers.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Sa'eda Kilani, MENA Director, sa'eda@article19.org, or +962-79-9860004
- 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.