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Asia - Afghanistan

Arbitrary detention

Journalist held on charge of collaborating with Taliban

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Reporters Without Borders calls on the authorities to explain the detention of **Syed Rahman Bekore**, the *Wakht News* agency's correspondent in the eastern province of Kunar, for allegedly assisting rebel groups.

A member of the Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA), Bekore has been held ever since his arrest by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Jalalabad, the capital of the neighbouring province of Nangarhar, on 27 April.

The NDS arrested two other journalists at the same time as Bekore but released them after four hours. Bekore, 50, was transferred to NDS headquarters in Kabul and then transferred back to the NDS detention centre in Jalalabad, where he is charged with collaborating with enemy countries and terrorists.

"We call on the NDS to provide a clear explanation for the charges against Bekore and their basis," said Réza Moïni, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Iran-Afghanistan desk.

"We understand the importance of the activities of those responsible for national security in a country threatened by terrorists, but detainees have rights that must be respected. Bekore must be allowed his right to have a lawyer and to receive visits from a delegation of representatives of journalists' associations, as well as his family."

Many of Bekore's fellow journalists and colleagues are unable to believe the charges. **Farida Neekzad**, the head of *Wakht News*, told Reporters Without Borders that he is "a very active and serious journalist, who comes from a well-known family of intellectuals."

Speaking on condition of anonymity, another journalist said: "Syed Rahman lived for 10 years in the Netherlands, returning in 2005 to help his country. He works for several media, writes remarkably well and has always defended democracy in Afghanistan. I don't understand the charges. I've known him for years."

He added: "The only explanation for these accusation could be linked to his activities for one of the presidential election candidates. The rival camp may have been responsible for fabricating the charges against him."

NDS spokesman Lotfollah Mashal told Reporters Without Borders yesterday that Bekore has confessed to working with "the security services of a neighbouring country and carrying the money of this country's consulate for the Taliban." He is being denied his right to see a lawyer.

Neekzad, AIJA president **Khpolwak Sapai** and a Reporters Without Borders representative had planned to visit Bekore at the NDS detention centre in Kabul today, only to be told at the last minute that "Bekore has been transferred to Jalalabad and the visit can be organized there."

The NDS spokesman added that the NDS had the right to "detain any terrorism suspect for an indefinite period" but as the case against Bekore was almost complete, he would be taken before a prosecutor on 17 May.

The case recalls that of **Hojatullah Mujadadi**, a journalist who was arrested by the NDS during parliamentary elections in 2010 for allegedly collaborating with the Taliban. A court eventually acquitted Mujadadi on 19 January 2011 after proceedings marked by grave abuses and barefaced lies by certain officials.
