

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/libye-court-sentences-editor-in-absentia-28-11-2014,47305.html>

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Middle East/North Africa - Libya

Arbitrary sentence

## Court sentences editor in absentia for five years in prison

28 November 2014

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Reporters Without Borders is outraged to learn that a Tripoli court sentenced Amara Abdallah Al-Khitabi, the editor of the privately-owned newspaper Al-Umma, in absentia to five years in prison and ordered him to pay 250,000 dinars in damages for allegedly defaming judicial officials.

Charged with criminal libel for publishing a list of allegedly corrupt judges and prosecutors in November 2012, Khitabi, 68, was convicted of criminal libel on 17 August but the sentence was not [notified](#) to him and his lawyer until last week.

"Khitabi does not deserve to go to prison for publishing this list", Reporters Without Borders deputy programme director Virginie Dangles said. "We urge the Libyan authorities to overturn this decision and to drop the case."

[Arrested](#) in December 2012, Khitabi refused to reveal where he got the list. But, according to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, it had already been posted on social network sites before Al-Umma published it.

The judicial officials on the list were said to have taken bribes or obtained money illicitly from other sources.

He was [charged](#) under article 195 of the Gaddafi-era criminal code, which is very controversial and repressive. The interim parliament, known as the General National Congress, passed an [amendment](#) to the criminal code on 5 February 2014 but it did not provide any additional guarantees for freedom of expression.

After four months in prison, Khitabi was [released](#) in April 2013 on medical grounds, but was ordered to remain at home and was banned from travelling abroad.

His lawyer, Ramadan Salem, plans to file an appeal on the grounds that the sentence has been issued at time when Tripoli's courts are paralyzed because of clashes between rival militias.

According to [Human Rights Watch](#), as well as jailing Khitabi and ordering him to pay damages to each of the five plaintiffs who brought the case, the court also banned him from practicing journalism while serving his sentence, and ordered that the withdrawal of his civil rights should continue for a year after his release.

Khitabi is on the [list of "100 information heroes"](#) that Reporters Without Borders compiled for this year's World Press Freedom Day (3 May).

Libya is ranked 137th out of 180 countries in the [2014 press freedom index](#) of organization.

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