

URGENT ACTION

POLITICAL ACTIVISTS RELEASED WITHOUT CHARGE

Southern Yemeni political activists Anwar Ismail and Khaled al-Junaidi have been released without charge. After being arrested and subjected to enforced disappearance by security forces in August, they were held incommunicado and reportedly tortured and otherwise ill-treated.

Anwar Ismail, 38, and **Khaled al-Junaidi**, 42, were released without charge on 13 November in the southern city of Aden following the issuance of a presidential decree to release them on 28 October. After being arrested and subjected to enforced disappearance on 28 and 31 August respectively, both activists were reportedly detained and tortured and otherwise ill-treated in several prisons in Aden, including al-Solban Political Security Prison, al-Tawahi Prison and al-Mansoura Prison.

The authorities denied holding both activists until they were briefly released to see their families during Eid al-Adha. They were immediately re-detained and held incommunicado in al-Mansoura Prison; they were not permitted visits from family members or access to their lawyer until the day the presidential decree was issued on 28 October.

Both activists were reportedly tortured during detention. They said they were hung by their wrists using handcuffs for 23 hours a day, affording them only one hour a day as a break to use the bathroom. Khaled al-Junaidi was hung for approximately a week, while Anwar Ismail was hung for a couple of days, apparently because it was recognized that he had high blood pressure and a heart condition. They were both ill-treated and threatened sexually during interrogations. They were held in solitary confinement in a small cell in al-Solban prison for half a month; its size only allowed them to stand. The cell had no ventilation or a toilet, and contained insects and the faeces of previous prisoners.

Anwar Ismail and Khaled al-Junaidi are leading activists in the Southern Movement, or al-Hirak, a coalition of political opposition groups in southern Yemen that has been demanding secession from the north. It is believed that both activists may have been targeted for disappearance because of their peaceful political activism. Anwar Ismail went missing on 28 August after a demonstration in Aden, where he was seen last, while witnesses reported that Khaled al-Junaidi was taken from a petrol station in Aden on 31 August after being beaten and dragged into an unmarked car by unidentified gunmen believed to be security agents.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the first update of UA 223/14. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE31/009/2014/en>



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Khaled al-Junaidi and Anwar Ismail are southern Yemeni political activists. Khaled al-Junaidi was previously arrested on four separate occasions, twice in 2011, and on two separate occasions in February and November 2013 for taking part in protests (see UA 313/13, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE31/017/2013/en> and update to UA 313/13, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE31/018/2013/en>). He was questioned for his political activism and released without charge within days in 2011 and within a month in February 2013, while he was held incommunicado for 21 days in November 2013 after being released without charge or trial. For his part, Anwar Ismail was arrested at least twice in 2014 prior to his disappearance in August, including in early March, when he alleges he was tortured in custody by security forces.

Protests in the south of Yemen have been taking place sporadically since 2007 when retired soldiers from the south launched protests complaining that they were not receiving the same treatment in employment, salary and pensions as soldiers from the north of the country. Since then, protests against discrimination against southerners gradually changed to demands for secession which continued after the ousting of the former regime in 2011.

The Southern Movement (also known as al-Hirak, a short form of its name in Arabic) appears to have emerged following the 2007 protests and began to organize its own demonstrations over what it perceives to be the government's failure to address discrimination against people from the south of the country.

The government's response to these protests has been heavy-handed. Dozens of demonstrators have been killed in or near demonstrations; in many cases they appear to have been shot dead unlawfully when posing no threat to the lives of the security forces or others. Since the protests began in 2007, the security forces have arrested and detained, in many cases arbitrarily, thousands of demonstrators and bystanders, as well as leaders and activists of the Southern Movement.

Name: Anwar Ismail and Khaled al-Junaidi
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 223/14 Index: MDE 31/010/2014 Issue Date: 17 November 2014