

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS REMOVED FROM SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Two Qatari activists have been removed from solitary confinement and granted regular access to family and lawyers. They are yet to be charged with any criminal offense.

On 27 March, five days after their arrest, **Muhammad Issa al-Baker** and **Mansour bin Rashed al-Matroushi** were removed from solitary confinement and granted regular use of the prison phone line. On 26 March they had been allowed a visit from family members and had also been visited by members of the Qatari National Human Rights Committee, but were not being permitted to make or receive phone calls. Amnesty International spoke to both men, who reported improvement in their detention conditions in terms of having access to medical attention, receiving regular meals, and being allowed to communicate with the outside world. They are yet to be charged with any crime and have not been shown any arrest warrant. On 23 March, they were told by authorities at the Doha central police headquarters that their detention without charge was extended to 15 days.

On 23 March both men were taken to the offices of the State Security Prosecutor and interrogated. They were not informed of any charges or an arrest warrant. Since then, one of their lawyers has met with the State Security Prosecutor's office and the Attorney General and similarly was informed that there were no charges against his clients.

Muhammad Issa al-Baker and Mansour bin Rashed al-Matroushi were arrested at a checkpoint manned by plain-clothes security force personnel on 22 March. They were taken to Doha's central police headquarters. The police acknowledged to the men's family that they were detaining them, but did not provide reasons for doing so. The arrest seems to have been prompted by a letter written by a large number of activists, which was delivered by the two men to the French embassy. According to the authorities, the letter, dated 3 March 2013, contains threats against the French embassy and citizens should France go ahead with its military intervention in Mali. However, according to the activists it was merely a protest letter warning the French authorities that a military intervention in Mali would increase hatred and violence. On 7 March, the French embassy notified the police authorities of the letter.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Welcoming the improvement in Muhammad Issa al-Baker and Mansour bin Rashed al-Matroushi's detention conditions, in particular the fact that they are now being allowed regular access to family and lawyers, have access to medical attention and have been visited by the Qatari National Human Rights Committee;
- Calling for the two men to be released without delay unless they are charged with an internationally recognizable crime and promptly tried in proceedings that fully comply with international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 MAY 2013 TO:

Minister of Interior

Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Thani
Ministry of the Interior
PO Box 920
Doha,
STATE OF QATAR
Fax: 011 974 4432 2927
Email: info@moi.gov.qa
Salutation: Your Excellency

Attorney General

Dr Ali bin Fetais Al Marri
PO Box 705
Doha,
STATE OF QATAR
Fax: 011 974 4484 3211
Email: info@pp.gov.qa
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Head of state (Amir of Qatar)

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani
PO Box 923
Doha,
STATE OF QATAR
Fax: 011 974 4436 1212

Also send copies to:

Ambassador Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al Rumaihi
Embassy of the State of Qatar, 2555 M St NW, Washington DC 20037-1305
Phone: 1 202 274 1600 | Fax: 1 202 237 0061 | Email: info@qatarembassy.net

Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Network office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS REMOVED FROM SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Freedom of expression is strictly controlled in Qatar, and the press often exercises self-censorship. The right to freedom of expression is further threatened by the 2004 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, whose provisions risk criminalizing legitimate activities. The Qatari government acceded to this convention in May 2008.

Since 2011, the State Security, which runs its own detention facilities, has detained a number of people, some of them for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. Most of those detained by State Security have reported torture and other ill-treatment during periods of detention prior to charge or trial, particularly during periods of incommunicado detention. Activists in Qatar have lately raised concerns that there has been a pattern of State Security personnel, generally operating in plain clothes, not identifying themselves when carrying out arrests and holding detainees in police detention centers and not in facilities run by them; the aim appears to be to deny responsibility for carrying out particular arrests and detentions and thereby to deflect criticism about their working practices.

Qatari poet Mohammed al-Ajami (also known as Mohammed Ibn al-Dheeb) was arrested by State Security on 16 November 2011 in Doha, and charged with “inciting to overthrow the ruling system” and “insulting the Amir”. He had presented himself to State Security when summoned, and immediately been arrested. He was detained incommunicado for months before he was allowed family visits. Local activists believe that the real reason for his arrest was his 2011 work “the Jasmine Poem”, which he wrote during the wave of protests throughout the Arab world that began in December 2010. The poem criticized Gulf States and reads: “We are all Tunisia in the face of the repressive elite”. In November 2012, the Criminal Court in Doha sentenced him to life in prison. Some observers were not allowed to enter the court, and Mohammed al-Ajami himself was not present at the sentencing. On 25 February 2013, the Court of Appeal in Doha reduced his sentence to 15 years’ imprisonment.

Names: Muhammad Issa al-Baker (m) and Mansour bin Rashed al-Matroushi (m)
Issues: Incommunicado detention, Arbitrary arrest, Freedom of expression

Further information on UA: 71/13 (25 March 2013) and update (27 March 2013)
Issue Date: 28 March 2013

Country: Qatar