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Middle East/North Africa - Oman

Flurry of convictions

Sultanate courts hand down long sentences on netizens

25 July 2012

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Reporters Without Borders strongly condemns the one-year sentences imposed on six netizens by the Muscat Court of First Instance on 16 July.

"We are shocked by the number of convictions of netizens and human rights activists, whose only offence was to exercise their right to free expression," the press freedom organization said.

"Their names are added to the already long list of those who have been convicted or are awaiting trial. The international community must put pressure on the sultanate to end the policy of stifling dissident voices carried out by its authorities with total impunity.

"We urge the authorities to reconsider these convictions and dismiss the charges against these netizens."

The official Omani news agency reported that **Mohammed Al-Badi, Mohammed Al-Habsi, Abdullah Al-Siyani, Talib Al-Abry, Abdullah Al-Araimi** and **Mona Hardan** were found guilty of publishing defamatory comments about Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Al-Abry and Al-Badi received a further six months each for breaking the law on cyber crime. All were arrested on 11 June and released on 25 June on bail of 1,000 rials (approx. 2,130 euros) each. Their appeal is due to be heard on 10 September.

Activists Al-Habsi and Al-Araimi took part in protests last year demanding greater freedom and democracy within the sultanate's institutions. Al-Habsi, who is also a photographer, was detained in May last year.

The Omani authorities' persecution of netizens and local journalists has assumed alarming proportions. Eleven other human rights activists who were also arrested on 11 June for illegal assembly and disturbing the peace are awaiting trial.

Among them are **Mukhtar Mohamed Al-Hanaei**, a journalist with the newspaper *Al-Zaman*, and several netizens including **Mahmoud Hamad Al-Rawahy** who was [convicted with three other activists on 9 July](#) of defaming the sultan and committing cyber crimes. Some were released on 25 June but five are still in custody. They are due to go on trial on 29 July.
