

Reporters Without Borders

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Middle East/North Africa - Oman

State repression increases Prison for netizens

9 August 2012

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Reporters Without Borders vigorously protests prison sentences meted out this month to 20 bloggers and Internet writers who have criticized the government.

"These sentences for supposed defamation," the press freedom organization said, "are part of a government campaign against netizens who have done no more than exercise their right to express themselves concerning the policies of Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al-Said and his government."

The organization called for overturning of the verdict on appeal, and dismissal of all criminal charges.

Gulfnews.com reported that **Said Al-Hashmi, Basma Rajhi, Basma Al-Kiyumi, Mukhtar Al-Hinai, Nasser Al-Gailani, Mohammad Al-Fazari, Mahmoud Al-Rawahi, Khalid Al-Nobli, Badar Al-Jabri, Mohammad Al-Janadi, Abdullah Al-Gilani** and **Osama Al-Thuwaiya** were sentenced on 8 August to one year in prison and fines of 200 riyals (420 euros) each for illegal assembly and disturbing public order. Some of them had also been convicted of defaming the sultan and of cyber-crime. Appeals would cost 1000 riyals (2100 euros) per person.

Contrary to standard procedure, Judge Yusuf Al-Faleti handed down the sentences at day's end before the start of the weekend. Those sentenced were transferred to prison. With the courts closed, they could not seek release on bail or file appeals and will not be able to do so until 11 August.

Action on a case against **Maimuna Baadi** was postponed to 26 August.

Previously, on 6 August, the Muscat Court of First Instance handed down one-year sentences for defaming the sultan. **Hilal Al Bu Saidi, Eisa Al-Masoudi, Bassam Abu-Qasida, Rashid Al-Badi, Mohammed Al-Kiyumi, Abdallah Al-Abdullah, Ahmed Al-Maamari** and **Awad Al-Sawafi** were also fined 1000 riyals (2130 euros). The specific charges centered on allegedly insulting comments about the sultan on social networks, as well as distribution of information said to disturb social peace.

Nevertheless, **Amina Al-Sa'adi** was acquitted on all counts. She had been free on bail since 25 July.

The Omani sultanate's determination to muzzle dissident voices is alarming. Before the latest round of sentences, the Muscat Court of First Instance had sentenced 10 people in July. They included **Mahmoud Hamad Al-Rawahy** and three other activists on 9 July, and [Mona Hardan and give other activists on 16 July](#).

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