

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST SENTENCED TO FOUR YEARS IN JAIL

On 28 May 2024, the Aden-based Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) sentenced journalist Ahmad Maher to four years in prison following a grossly unfair trial on charges of disseminating false and misleading news and forging identity documents. Ahmad Maher was arrested on 6 August 2022 by security forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) de facto authorities in Aden. During interrogations at the Dar Sa'ad police station, security forces subjected him to torture and other ill-treatment to force him to "confess" to being involved in an attack on Dar Sa'ad police station in March 2022. He was denied access to adequate healthcare including for injuries sustained as a result of torture. He was also denied the right to adequate defence, to access a lawyer of his choosing, to presumption of innocence and not to self-incriminate, rendering his detention arbitrary.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Major General Aidros Alzubidi

President of the Southern Transitional Council

X: @AidrosAlzubidi

Dear Major General Aidros Alzubidi,

I am concerned to learn that the Aden-based Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) sentenced journalist **Ahmad Maher**, 29, to four years in prison. According to a relative, Ahmad Maher was sentenced on charges of disseminating false and misleading news, a crime that is not recognized under international law, and forging identity documents in a hearing that lasted only five minutes.

On 6 August 2022, STC affiliated security forces of Dar Sa'ad police station stormed Ahmad Maher's house in Dar Sa'ad neighbourhood without a warrant, beat him with the butts of their rifles and assaulted other family members. Following his arrest, he was detained at Dar Sa'ad police station for over a month, during which he was denied family visits and access to a lawyer. According to a relative, Ahmad Maher was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment daily, including through beatings, water boarding, electric shocks and mock executions. In addition, he was threatened with harm to his family, including his wife and baby girl, to force him to "confess" to involvement in an attack on Dar Sa'ad police station which took place in March 2022. During a hearing before the Aden-based SCC on 6 March 2023, Ahmad Maher told the judge that he was subjected to torture and that his "confession" was extracted under duress, but the judge failed to order an investigation. Authorities have denied Ahmad Maher access to healthcare, including for injuries sustained to his naval area as a result of torture.

In December 2022, Ahmad Maher's trial began before the Aden-based SCC on charges of disseminating false and misleading news and forging identity documents. He was tried together with a group of other detainees charged with carrying out an attack on Dar Sa'ad police station in March 2022, although, according to his lawyer, the prosecution has failed to present any evidence indicating his involvement in the attack. His trial hearings were repeatedly postponed, and he was denied access to his lawyer throughout detention.

I urge you to quash Ahmad Maher's conviction and sentence imposed after a grossly unfair trial. Unless tried for internationally recognizable offences in proceedings meeting international standards for fair trial, excluding "confessions" extracted under torture or duress, Ahmad Maher must be immediately released. I also urge you to ensure that Ahmad Maher is protected from further torture and other ill-treatment and that he is given, without delay, access to adequate healthcare and regular access to his lawyer and family.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 4 September 2022, Dar Sa'ad police station released a video which was shared on social media and national media news outlets featuring Ahmad Maher. In the video, which Amnesty International analysed, Ahmad Maher appears to "confess" to criminal offences including the forgery of identity documents for members of the military and his knowledge of assassination schemes against two STC military generals. According to his lawyer, the video, which violates his right to presumption of innocence, was not requested by the prosecution and was not recorded in their presence. A few days after the video was made public, a member of the criminal prosecution interrogated Ahmad Maher in Dar Sa'ad police station in the presence of members of Dar Sa'ad security forces who all were, according to Ahmad Maher's relative, involved in his torture. During questioning by the prosecution, Ahmad Maher retracted his "confession", stating that he was forced to make it under duress, and asked for referral to medical treatment. The prosecution requested the director of the police station to refer Ahmad Maher for treatment, but the request was refused. On 15 September 2022, Ahmad Maher was transferred to Bir Ahmad prison where he remains to date.

On 16 November 2023, security forces of the STC physically assaulted and arbitrarily detained Ahmad Maher's lawyer, [Sami Yassin](#), as he was leaving work at the Supreme Judicial Council and Judicial Inspection in Khormaksar, Aden governorate. Following his arrest, security forces held him for almost four months at al-Nasr military camp, an official detention centre under the command of the Security Belt forces. According to leaked letters from Sami Yassin, while detained there he was tortured and held in solitary confinement. Throughout his detention, he has been held incommunicado and denied his right to contact and meet his family and a legal representative. On 6 March 2024, he was transferred to Bir Ahmad prison in Aden governorate, where he remains to date amid serious concerns for his health. Sami Yassin's brother, who is also one of his lawyers, told Amnesty International that before his detention, Sami Yassin received several threats from STC-affiliated security and judicial authority figures because of his work, including for following up on the case of a detainee who died in custody in June 2023 and the case of Ahmad Maher.

All parties to the conflict in Yemen have perpetrated grave human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment and unfair trials. In November 2023, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen [reported](#) that STC affiliated forces are detaining, subjecting to enforced disappearance, or threatening journalists and activists who publicly criticize them and are forcing them to sign or deliver "confessions". The Panel also documented that STC-affiliated forces are systematically torturing detainees in formal and secret prisons.

In July 2018, Amnesty International published a [report](#) on enforced disappearances and detention violations committed by UAE-backed security forces, including the Security Belt forces in southern Yemen. Many arrests appeared to be based on unfounded suspicions and personal vendettas. Among those targeted were former fighters who fought in the 2015 battles to rout the Huthis from the south and who were later seen as a threat; sympathizers and members of the Hadi-aligned Islah party, Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood branch; as well as activists and critics of the coalition.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 December 2024.
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ahmad Maher (he/him).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/7627/2024/en/>.

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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