

Why is publishing so dangerous? - detained journo's wife

The wife of a hunger-striking Libyan journalist has told Amnesty International of her disbelief that her husband has been imprisoned and denied bail for 'offending' the judiciary under an al-Gaddafi-era law.

Amara al-Khattabi, the editor-in-chief of *al-Umma* newspaper, was arrested last December and has been on hunger strike since 28 February 2013 in protest at his detention. He was arrested a month after his newspaper published a list of 84 judges allegedly involved in corruption.

His wife Masara al-Ghussain declared a hunger strike in his support on Sunday, after al-Khattabi was transferred to a hospital on 4 April due to his deteriorating health.

"All he did was to publish a list of judges," his wife told Amnesty International.

"Has the act of copying and pasting now become so dangerous in Libya that it requires people being sent to prison?"

Charged with "offending" the judiciary, al-Khattabi faces up to 15 years in prison under Article 195 of the Code of Criminal Procedure relating to "the insulting of constitutional or popular authorities", a law frequently used in the al-Gaddafi era to repress freedom of expression.

Should've never been arrested

Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of the journalist who should have never been arrested in the first place for publishing such a list.

Masara al-Ghussain is calling on the court to release the senior journalist at the next hearing scheduled for Monday, 15 April.

She has told Amnesty International: "I am protesting in solidarity with my husband until I see that the court agrees to release him on bail. He should be allowed to stand trial outside of prison given his age and health condition."

Amara al-Khattabi is 67 and suffers from a number of chronic diseases including diabetes and hypertension. Despite this, the court has persisted in denying him bail. He is now in the 41th day of his hunger strike.

"The court refuses to release my husband on bail because of the alleged security threat that he poses," his wife said.

"I wonder how can a journalist, the editor-in-chief of a newspaper, who published an article, be equated with criminal

offenders accused of crimes such as murder, drug-trafficking or rape?"

Amnesty International has called on the Libyan authorities to drop all charges against al-Khattabi immediately, and to repeal laws which unduly restrict freedom of expression.

"While we are relieved that Amara al-Khattabi has been given access to medical care, he should be released unconditionally at the end of his treatment, not transferred back to prison," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director.

"We are disturbed that the Libyan authorities are resorting to these old laws, which were used to repress dissent and arrest thousands for voicing their political opinions during the al-Gaddafi era. As Libya is building new institutions based on the rule of law, a free press is an essential component and the authorities must do more to protect freedom of expression."

Amara al-Khattabi's charges were initially related to his newspapers registration, but his lawyer provided the court with proper documentation. Amnesty International fears that Amara al-Khattabi is now being tried solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

"Raising questions regarding allegation of corruption and misconduct by judges is a legitimate activity, which should not be criminalized," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director.

The journalist's right to a fair trial has been undermined throughout the court proceedings, exacerbating Amnesty International's concerns.

In the last hearing on 1 April, the court prevented the lawyer of Amara al-Khattabi's choice to plead the case, appointing a different lawyer against the journalist's will. The family opposed the decision and fear that further restrictions might be imposed.

Under Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Libya is party, the state has an obligation to uphold fair trial rights and grant Amara al-Khattabi access to a lawyer of his choosing.

Source: [allAfrica](#)

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