

Amnesty International

# SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT BRIEFING



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## MEMBERS DEBATE: DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER

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**15 NOVEMBER 2018**

On Thursday 15 November, the Members Debate [S5M-14312](#) will take place in the Scottish Parliament:

That the Parliament recognises 15 November as the Day of the Imprisoned Writer, which is a day when people are invited to stand in solidarity with persecuted, exiled and imprisoned writers across the globe; notes with grave concern what it sees as the international decline in free expression, as documented by organisations such as PEN International, Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders; understands that there are global efforts by state and non-state actors to attack and silence journalists; notes the view that governments around the world have a requirement to combat impunity and seek justice for murdered, persecuted, and imprisoned writers; acknowledges initiatives by national and international governmental, intergovernmental and civil society partners to work together to secure protections for persecuted and imprisoned writers; commemorates writers who have been killed for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and acknowledges the call for the Day of the Imprisoned Writer to be officially recognised by the Parliament..

Amnesty International UK raise the cases of writers imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Amnesty use a series of events during the Edinburgh International Book Festival, and an annual event at the Scottish Parliament to give voice to those imprisoned. This year's event is in the Burns Room from 5.30pm this evening, and you are very welcome to join us.

### **Jamal Khashoggi**

Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi was killed after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October – he was an outspoken critic of powerful Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman. His killing exposed the limits of silent diplomacy when faced with a sharp and sustained disregard for human rights and acted as a catalyst for global condemnation of the Kingdom's blanket suppression of human rights. Khashoggi was best known for coverage of the events of Afghanistan, Algeria, Kuwait and the Middle East in the 1990s. He met and interviewed Osama Bin Laden several times ahead of his leadership of al-Qaeda. Amnesty International has called upon the Turkish government to request the [UN](#)

### **Saudi Arabia**

[Secretary General to order an urgent investigation](#) into Khashoggi's death and the circumstances surrounding it. His family and the world deserve the full truth about what happened to him, and those responsible, however high their rank or status, must face justice.

*"My fiancé Jamal Khashoggi was a Lonely Patriot.  
His ideas will reverberate from Turkey to Saudi Arabia and beyond.  
Oppression never lasts forever. Tyrants eventually pay for their sins."*

**Hatice Cengiz**

**Ms. Cengiz, a doctoral student at a university in Istanbul, is Jamal Khashoggi's fiancée**

Amnesty believes an independent investigation is the only guarantee against what increasingly appears to be a Saudi whitewash surrounding the circumstances of Khashoggi's murder or any attempts by other governments to sweep the issue under the carpet to preserve lucrative arms deals and other business ties with Riyadh.

This assassination within the grounds of the consulate amounts to an extrajudicial execution. It has sent a shockwave among Saudi Arabian [human rights defenders](#), journalists and dissidents everywhere by reinforcing the notion that Saudi Arabia can act with total impunity using its embassies and consulates as safe havens from prosecution anywhere around the world. Revelations of the chilling details of his death exposed the brutality of a supposedly modernising monarchy in Riyadh in crushing dissent. Although exceptionally gruesome, the killing of Jamal Khashoggi is unfortunately not an isolated event; it continues a long-standing pattern of repression and a crackdown on peaceful dissent which has only intensified since Mohammed bin Salman became Crown Prince.

In light of the killing, the European Parliament offered strong criticism of Saudi Arabia's crackdown on activists and journalists. Amnesty International has documented scores of unlawful attacks committed by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen, including indiscriminate and disproportionate airstrikes that have killed and injured civilians and destroyed scores of homes, schools, hospitals, markets and mosques and is calling for all arms-supplying states to suspend arms transfers to Saudi Arabia and its coalition members.

*"The Arab world was ripe with hope during the spring of 2011. Journalists, academics and the general population were brimming with expectations of a bright and free Arab society within their respective countries. They expected to be emancipated from the hegemony of their governments and the consistent interventions and censorship of information. These expectations were quickly shattered; these societies either fell back to the old status quo or faced even harsher conditions than before."*

**Jamal Khashoggi**

**from his last article, published posthumously in the Washington Post**

**Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh**

**Vietnam**

Known as Mẹ Nấm (Mother Mushroom) online, the influential Vietnamese blogger was arrested on 10 October 2016 and held incommunicado until June the following year. On 29

June 2017, she received a ten-year prison sentence, having been convicted of “conducting propaganda against the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” under Article 88 of Vietnam’s Penal Code.

Me Nam co-founded the independent Vietnamese Bloggers Network in 2013. She is a mother of two children, who has on numerous occasions faced harassment, arrest and interrogation for her peaceful activities, and she had been prevented from travelling overseas. She has advocated for human rights and justice for more than ten years in Vietnam.

Almost a month ago today, she was released from prison; the condition for her release was exile. There are more than 100 people languishing in jail because they peacefully exercised their freedom of expression – in public or online.

The Vietnam authorities’ planned introduction of a Cybersecurity Law in January 2019 will offer the state more tools to silence dissent and imprison citizens. It should not be implemented lest others face the same horrific treatment as Mother Mushroom and others still in jail. Amnesty International has called upon Vietnam to release all prisoners of conscience and quash their sentences immediately and unconditionally.

*“Who will speak if you don’t?” – motto of Me Nam “Mother Mushroom” blog*

### **Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mkhaitir**

### **Mauritania**

Blogger Mohamed Mkhaitir was convicted and sentenced to death on 25 December 2014 for a “blasphemous” post he made on Facebook the previous year. His blog post – *Religion, Religiosity and Blacksmiths* – condemned the use of religion to justify discriminatory practices against members of the blacksmith cast, with which he identifies. Following the publication of his post, he received threatening phone calls accusing him of blasphemy. He published a second blog explaining that his article was aimed at denouncing those who use religion to belittle members of lower casts. Thousands of protestors took to the streets in several towns, including Nouadhibou and the capital Nouakchott, demanding that Mohamed Mkhaitir be sentenced to death.

Amnesty International stated that the death sentence was imposed in clear contradiction to Mauritania’s obligations under international human rights law, particularly the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, to which it is a state party.

In 2017, the Appeal Court commuted his death sentence and although authorities should have released him in November 2017, he is still being detained in an undisclosed location. His physical and mental health are deteriorating as a result of his prolonged detention. Amnesty International is one of 32 human rights organisations campaigning for his release and protection.

**Further cases identified by Amnesty International can be shared for use in the debate, please get in touch to request an individual case.**

### **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL – SCOTLAND OFFICE**

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