

URGENT ACTION

OMANI PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE RELEASED

Omani prisoner of conscience Saeed Jaddad was released from prison on 26 August, having served nine months of a one-year prison sentence under Oman's cybercrimes law for a blog he wrote in October 2014.

Saeed Jaddad, an Omani businessman and human rights activist, aged 50, was released on 26 August from Arzat Prison, west of Dhofar province's capital, Salalah. He had served three quarters of a one-year prison sentence issued following his conviction on charges of "inciting to break national unity and spreading discord within society" in relation to a blog he wrote in October 2014 in which he compared the 2011 protests in Dhofar province to the 2014 protests in Hong Kong. Under Article 76 of the Omani Penal Code a sentence can be suspended if the prisoner is judged to have reformed and has served three quarters of their sentence.

Saeed Jaddad was arrested at his home on 10 December 2014 in relation to the October 2014 blog and officials searched his home and confiscated his phone and computers. He was held and interrogated for at least five days without being allowed to contact his family or a lawyer. His interrogators put pressure on him to sign documents that accused him of crimes including "harming the country and violating its laws" and "contacting foreign bodies". He refused to do this or answer questions subsequently put to him by a prosecutor without a lawyer present and his detention was extended. He was released on bail on 22 December 2014. The first hearing of this case took place in his absence in Salalah on 27 January 2015. Saeed Jaddad was sentenced on 31 March 2015 to one year in prison and a fine of 1,000 Omani rials (about US\$2,600) by a court of first instance in Salalah. The Appeal Court upheld the sentence on 18 November. He was arrested a week later, on 25 November, to serve his sentence and transferred to prison, after a raid on his home at 1am that same day.

Saeed Jaddad had previously been arrested several times. He was arrested on 14 January 2013 and held for six months, including eight days in solitary confinement. He was released at the end of June 2013 but banned from publishing articles in the national media. He refused to sign a statement renouncing pro-reform and human rights activities, after facing pressure from the authorities to do so. In August that year he was charged with "undermining the status and prestige of the state" after he called for political and social reforms and held meetings with members of the European Parliament. He was arrested at his home in Salalah on 21 January 2015 to face trial on these charges. A court of first instance in the capital, Muscat, sentenced him on 8 March to three years in prison and a fine for "undermining the prestige of the state"; one year in prison and a fine for "incitement to protest"; and three years in prison and a fine for "using social media to disseminate information that infringed on the sanctity of public order". The court ordered that Saeed Jaddad should serve the three sentences concurrently and pay the combined fine of 1,700 Omani rials (US\$4,415). He was released on bail on 7 April and his appeal began on 15 April. On 9 September 2015 the Appeal Court in Muscat upheld his sentence of three years in prison, suspended for three years, and a fine.

Information about trials in Oman has been increasingly difficult to obtain since 2015. The authorities have further tightened their grip on freedom of expression and exerted more pressure on activists to give up their work.

No further action is requested from the UA Network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the eighth update of UA 318/14. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde20/2974/2015/en/>

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