

# Omani newspaper threatened with closure for exposing judiciary corruption

MUSCAT, OMAN: Sultanate of Oman is threatening to shut down the independent newspaper *Al-Zaman* for publishing an article alleging corruption in the Ministry of Justice, the Committee to Protect Journalists said yesterday, 15 August 2011. The article's author, prominent Omani journalist and filmmaker Youssef al-Haj, stands trial on Sunday and could face prison time if convicted.



"The Omani authorities are engaging in retaliatory tactics against Youssef al-Haj for his critical writing," said Mohamed Abdel Dayem, CPJ Middle East and North Africa program coordinator. "The steps taken by the Omani judiciary suggest that this is a political vendetta rather than an effort to apply justice."

Al-Haj has written widely on social and political issues and in defense of human rights and freedom of expression in Oman. He has protested in front of the Ministry of Information demanding the right to a free press. In the past, he was interrogated for articles he wrote on three separate occasions.

## The article in question

Al-Haj is being investigated for a May 14 article alleging that the justice minister and his deputy refused to grant a salary and grade increase to Haroun al-Mukeebli, a long-time civil servant, even though Omani law details a specific salary grade for the position, local and international human rights activists reported. According to the article, al-Mukeebli attempted to bring his case to court but the vice president of the Supreme Judicial Council intervened to disrupt the proceedings and ordered him to give up his right to dispute his superior's decision.

On July 5, the journalist was called in for questioning at the public prosecutor's office without his lawyer present. He was charged with "insulting the minister of justice and his deputy," "attempting to create a division in society," "abusing the judiciary in Oman," "violating the publications and publishing law," and "practicing a profession without a permit from the Ministry of Information," according to CPJ's review of documents from Omani authorities. On July 8, the minister of information banned al-Haj from publishing or writing articles. The prosecutor's office told him that the justice minister had filed a case accusing him of "insulting his dignity," according to local human rights activists.

Local human rights activists also reported that the *Al-Zaman* editor-in-chief Ibrahim al-Ma'mari was interrogated along with al-Mukeebli. On Tuesday, prominent Omani citizens, among them civil-society activists, lawyers, and journalists, issued a statement condemning the prosecutor for seeking to shut down *Al-Zaman*, saying the action would "take us back to a world of repression and restriction of freedoms," according to the pan-Arab daily *Al-Quds al-Arabi*.

Source: [Committee to Protect Journalists](#)

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