

Libya must let journalist travel for medical care

The Committee to Protect Journalists is deeply concerned about the health of editor Amara al-Khatabi and calls on Libyan authorities to allow him to travel in order to receive urgent medical assistance abroad.



Al-Khatabi, the editor of daily Al-Ummah, was imprisoned December 19, 2012, under the Qaddafi-era penal code, on charges of insulting and defaming members of the judiciary. The charges related to a story published in Al-Ummah in November 2012 accusing 87 judges and others in the judiciary of accepting bribes and of being loyal to the late Muammar Qaddafi. He was the first journalist to be tried for such criminal charges since Qaddafi was ousted, Human Rights Watch said.

Al-Khatabi was released on bail on April 14 by Tripoli's Court of Appeals, according to news reports. His lawyer, Ramdan Farag, told CPJ that his passport was confiscated and he is banned from traveling, but he has severe health problems and needs immediate medical care not available in Libya. Al-Khatabi, 67, is suffering from diabetes, high blood pressure, and lung problems, and is barely able to speak, Farag said.

"We are extremely worried about the health of Amara al-Khatabi and urge the judicial authorities in Libya to allow him to travel for medical treatment as soon as possible," said CPJ Middle East and North Africa Coordinator Sherif Mansour. "We further call on the judiciary to drop the charges against the journalist, which were filed under the archaic laws of Libya's autocratic past."

Al-Khatabi, 67, waged a hunger strike to protest his detention conditions and lack of access to his family and lawyer, exacerbating his health problems. He attended his trial, which began 1 April, in a wheelchair, and has been hospitalized since before his release, according to Human Rights Watch.

Just prior to presiding Judge Ali Al-Zwid granting bail, both the Libyan minister of judiciary affairs and the minister of cultural affairs called on the judge to release Al-Khatabi. "The arrest of writers and journalists should not be present in the new Libya and I hope al-Khatabi will be released soon," said Cultural Affairs Minister Habib Mohamed, according to news reports.

Source: CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists)

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