

Oman: Release politician jailed for taking part in environmental protest

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The Omani authorities must release a politician jailed for his involvement in an environmental protest, Amnesty International said after an appeal court upheld today.

“The case against Talib al-Ma’amari appears to be politically motivated and based solely on his participation in a peaceful protest,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa programme.

“Al-Ma’amari is a prisoner of conscience – convicted for peacefully expressing his opinion and he faced an unfair trial that seemed destined to ensure that he remained in prison. He should be immediately and unconditionally released.”

Talib al-Ma’amari, an elected member of the Sultanate of Oman’s Shoura Council, appears to have been imprisoned on charges of “undermining the status of the state” for taking part in a protest.

He was detained in August last year after taking part in a protest near the Port of Sohar, Liwa province, against pollution and environmental degradation caused by a nearby industrial plant.

After his initial conviction for security-related and public order offences was overturned in February 2014, he faced a re-trial that was plagued by irregularities.

These included the presiding judge giving erroneous or misleading summaries of witness testimonies and video footage screened in court of a different demonstration to the one Talib al-Ma’amari attended on 22 August 2013.

Security forces dispersed a group of peaceful protesters using pressurized water and tear gas during the protest.

Some also reportedly threw sticks and stones at demonstrators, which included women, elderly people and children.

Amnesty International understands that Talib al-Ma’amari, in his role as Shoura Council member for the region, acted as intermediary to maintain a dialogue between demonstrators and security forces.

“The resort to tear gas and pressurised water as a means of dispersing peaceful protesters, not to mention throwing sticks and stones, would amount to an unnecessary and excessive use of force by the security forces,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

According to the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, law enforcement officials may only use force if other means remain ineffective or have no promise of achieving the intended result. When using force, law enforcement officials should exercise restraint and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offense and to the legitimate objective to be achieved.

“The Omani authorities would do better to fully, thoroughly and impartially investigate these allegations rather than pursuing this apparent vendetta against a politician whose role in this protest was, if anything, constructive.

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<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/oman-release-politician-jailed-taking-part-environmental-protest-2014-10-30>