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ANNEX 8.50



Libya: Free Detained Journalists

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At Least 6 Libyan and 4 Foreign Media Workers Held

March 23, 2011

(New York) - The Libyan government should release all Libyan and foreign journalists detained because of their reporting and allow them to cover the crisis in Libya freely, Human Rights Watch said today.

Since anti-government protests began in Libya on February 15, 2011, the government has harassed, detained, and beaten journalists trying to cover the story. A Libyan journalist and a Qatari cameraman have been killed by gunfire in unclear circumstances.

At least six Libyan journalists are believed to be in detention, with their locations unknown, Human Rights Watch said. Four foreign journalists from the Doha-based Al Jazeera television network are also being held.

"The Libyan government should end its crackdown on journalists trying to cover the conflict," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Libyan and international journalists are facing beatings and arrests - some are missing - for trying to do their work."

The four detained Al Jazeera journalists are Ahmad Val Wald-Eddin, 34, a correspondent from Mauritania; Lutfi al-Massoudi, 34, a correspondent from Tunisia; Ammar al-Hamdan, 34, a cameraman from Norway; and Ammar al-Tallou, a cameraman from the United Kingdom. Al Jazeera said on March 23 that the Libyan authorities would release the crew within 24 hours. Sami al-Hajj, head of Al Jazeera's Public Liberties and Human Rights Desk, told Human Rights Watch that the network's four workers were arrested in Zantan, near the border with Tunisia, about two weeks ago as they were trying to leave Libya.

The Libyan government has repeatedly accused Al Jazeera of biased reporting and has jammed the broadcaster's signal.

On March 12, unidentified gunmen, in an ambush near Benghazi, killed an Al Jazeera cameraman, Ali Hassan al-Jaber, and wounded his colleague, Naser al-Hadar. Al Jazeera's director-general, Wadah Khanfar, said the ambush came after "an unprecedented campaign" against the network by the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi.

On March 19, Mohammed al-Nabbous, a Libyan journalist, died from gunfire during fighting between government forces and armed rebels near Benghazi. Al-Nabbous had been broadcasting news from Benghazi for the online Libya Al-Hurra TV, which he founded.

On March 23, the government released Dave Clark, a reporter, and Roberto Schmidt, a photographer, both from Agence France-Presse, and Joe Raedle, a photographer for Getty Images, all of whom who had been held since March 19.

On March 21, the government released four journalists working for *The New York Times*, who had been detained by Libyan soldiers in



Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi speaks during an interview with TRT Turkish television in Tripoli, March 9, 2011.

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Ahmad Val Wald-Eddin

Photo courtesy of Al Jazeera



Lutfi al-Massoudi

Photo courtesy of Al Jazeera

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Ajdabiya on March 15. The journalists - Anthony Shadid, Stephen Farrell, Tyler Hicks, and Lynsey Addario - said after their release that soldiers had threatened them with death, and beat, slapped, and punched them during their six-day detention. The whereabouts of the team's Libyan driver, Mohamed Shaglouf, remain unknown

On March 8, the Libyan government released three journalists from the BBC, after holding them for 21 hours. Two of the journalists said they had been beaten and all three had been subjected to a mock execution. One of the BBC journalists, Feras Killani, a Palestinian with a Syrian passport, said a military captain beat, kicked, and kneed him. "Then he found a plastic pipe on the ground and beat me with that," Killani told *The Guardian* newspaper. "Then one of the soldiers gave him a long stick."

The Committee to Protect Journalists has documented more than 60 attacks on the press in Libya over the past month. These include the deaths of al-Nabbous and al-Jaber, 36 detentions and 9 assaults.

The Libyan government has also restricted the free movement of journalists in areas of western Libya under its control, allowing them to travel only with government escorts who supervise their work. Journalists who attempt to leave their hotel in Tripoli without an escort are halted and sometimes detained.

Even prior to the current conflict, the media in Libya were strictly controlled, Human Rights Watch said.

Libyan law does not meet international standards for free expression. The country's Constitutional Declaration of 1969 guarantees freedom of expression only "within the limits of public interest and the principles of the [Al Fatah] Revolution." Law 20, On Enhancing Freedom, states that "Every citizen has the right to openly express his thoughts and opinions in the Peoples' Congresses and in the Jamahiriya [country's] media" unless "he uses [that right] in violation of the people's authority or for personal motives."

"Muammar Gaddafi never respected freedom of the press before this crisis but he has really turned the screws over the past month," Whitson said. "The government is using violence and intimidation to keep the world from knowing what is going on."

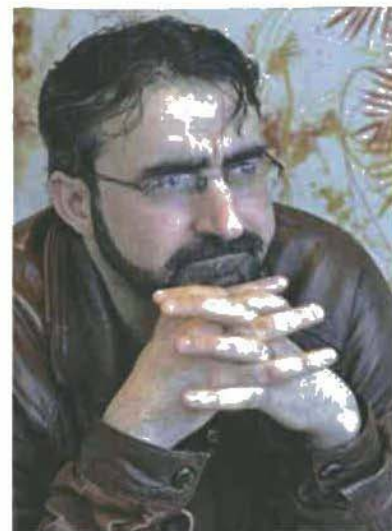
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Ammar al-Hamdan

Photo courtesy of Al Jazeera



Ammar al-Tallou

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Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North
Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

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