

# URGENT ACTION

## WOMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER AT RISK OF EXECUTION

Fatma al-Arwali, a 34-year-old woman human rights defender, is at risk of execution after the Huthi-controlled Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in Sana'a, Yemen, convicted her of 'aiding an enemy country' and sentenced her to death on 5 December 2023 following a grossly unfair trial. Since her arrest in August 2022, the Huthi's security and intelligence service subjected Fatma al-Arwali to a litany of human rights violations, including enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention, in conditions violating the absolute prohibition of torture or other ill-treatment.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

**Ansarullah Spokesperson**

Mohamed Abdelsalam

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Dear Mohamed Abdelsalam,

*I am deeply concerned that woman human rights defender **Fatma al-Arwali** is at risk of execution after the Huthi-controlled Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in Sana'a sentenced her to death on 5 December 2023, following a grossly unfair trial. Fears for her life mounted after her brother received a phone call on 18 January 2024 from an unknown number and was told that she will be executed on 21 February 2024 in Tahrir Square in Sana'a, Yemen's capital. On 21 January 2024, he visited the security and intelligence service centre in al-Siyasi neighbourhood in Sana'a, and officials denied there was an order to execute her.*

*On 13 August 2022, Huthi security forces arrested Fatma al-Arwali at a checkpoint in al Manshour in Ta'iz governorate. They subjected her to enforced disappearance for about eight months during which her family looked for her in every police station and prison in Sana'a, while authorities denied them any information about her fate and whereabouts. The family later informally learned that she had been held incommunicado at the security and intelligence detention centre in Chamlan in Sana'a following her arrest, where she remains held to date. Enforced disappearance is a crime under international law.*

*On 31 July 2023, the criminal prosecution charged Fatma al-Arwali with collaborating with the UAE and providing coordinates to disclose the locations of Huthi's armed forces and "people's committees", a charge that carries the death sentence, in addition to using a fake identity document. Her case was referred to trial by the SCC. Fatma al-Arwali has been denied her right to a fair trial. On 19 September 2023, during her first hearing, the judge refused to record the presence of her lawyer in the court record. Members of the security and intelligence service, who were present, tried to remove her lawyer from the court. The judge then told Fatma al-Arwali that there was no need for a lawyer. Fatma Al-Arwali told the judge that she was being held in cruel and inhuman conditions in a room underground. She also requested to see her children.*

*On 5 December 2023, the SCC convicted her of "aiding an enemy country" and sentenced her to death. While according to Yemeni law, Fatma al-Arwali is entitled to have her conviction and sentence reviewed by the High Court, concerns remain over its independence and impartiality.*

***We urge the Huthi de facto authorities to immediately quash the conviction and death sentence and ensure that Fatma al-Arwali receives a fair retrial before a competent, independent and impartial court without recourse to the death penalty, otherwise she must be immediately released with all charges dropped. In the meantime, we urge you to ensure that she has regular access to her family and lawyer and is held in conditions meeting international standards for the treatment of prisoners.***

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[Fatma al-Arwali](#) was the former head of the Yemen office of the Women Leadership Union of the Arab League and was active in promoting women's rights.

Fatma al-Arwali's death sentence was marred by fair trial violations. In view of the irreversible nature of the death penalty, the proceedings in capital cases must scrupulously observe all relevant international standards protecting the right to a fair trial. Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge must be treated in full compliance with Yemen's human rights obligations including rights to a fair trial. These include the rights to choose one's own lawyer; to access effective legal assistance from the time of arrest and throughout the pre-trial and trial proceedings; to be brought promptly before an ordinary civilian judge; to challenge the lawfulness of detention before an independent, impartial tribunal; to be presumed innocent; to remain silent and not to be compelled to incriminate oneself or to confess guilt; to obtain full access to relevant evidence; to not be detained on vague charges; to examine and cross-examine witnesses; to receive a fair, public hearing before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal; and to be provided with a public, reasoned judgment.

Since 2015, Amnesty International has documented the cases of over 60 individuals, who have been brought before the Sana'a-based SCC, including journalists, human rights defenders, political opponents, and members of religious minorities who were subjected to unfair trials on spurious or trumped-up charges by this court. Virtually all of them have been tried on spying charges, which are punishable by death under Yemeni law.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Amnesty International has consistently called on all states that retain the death penalty to establish an official moratorium on executions, with a view to completely abolishing the death penalty.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Arabic and English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 28 March 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Fatma al-Arwali (she/her)