



His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said  
Diwan of the Royal Court  
PO Box 632, Muscat 113  
Sultanate of Oman

August 24, 2016

Subject: closure of newspaper *Azamn* and detention of three of its journalists

Your Majesty,

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), two NGOs that defend media freedom, would like to draw your attention to the decline in media freedom in the Sultanate of Oman.

Media professionals in Oman are worried about the newspaper *Azamn's* closure and the illegitimate detention of three of its journalists as a result of an article on July 26, 2016 about suspected corruption within the judicial system. The three journalists – editor Ibrahim Al-Maamari, deputy editor Youssef Al-Haj and local news editor Zaher Al-Abri – appeared in court on Monday 15 August on charges including undermining the prestige of the state, disturbing public order, and violating a ban on publishing on the case. During the second session of the trial on August 22, Zaher Al-Abri, was released on bail and the trial was postponed to August 29. Surprisingly, the Omani court also ordered that journalists and civil society representatives refrain from publishing details of the hearings.

This high-profile trial has garnered international attention and wide support on social media from people who appreciate the newspaper's coverage or show solidarity with its journalists.

Detaining and prosecuting journalists because of their investigative coverage of a judicial case amounts to criminalizing the very essence of journalism, which is to provide the public with information. The Sultanate of Oman has a much deserved

reputation at the international level today in mediating crises in the international arena, and it has potential to rise as a more tolerant and stable actor in the region.

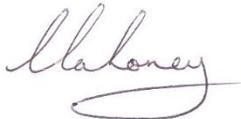
We therefore ask you to intercede to obtain the unconditional release of these journalists. We recognize the government's right to deny the accuracy of *Azamn's* reporting. But no journalist should be jailed for their reporting, regardless of the government's contentions concerning the veracity of their work. We also urge the lifting of the newspaper suspension ordered by the Ministry of Information on August 9.

We are extremely disturbed by the latest restrictive measures adopted with regard to the newspaper and its members, and we hope that, as result of your intervention, independent media voices will no longer be silenced.

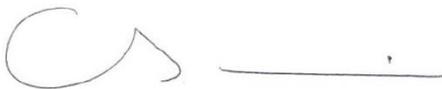
We thank you in advance for the attention you give to our requests.

Sincerely,

Robert Mahoney, Deputy Executive Director, Committee to Protect Journalists

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mahoney".

Christophe Deloire, Secretary-General, Reporters Without Borders

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "C. Deloire".