

| Network of Concerned Historians |                |          |         | NCH                     |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------|---------|-------------------------|
| Campaigns                       |                |          |         |                         |
| Year original                   | Year follow-up | Circular | Country | Names                   |
| 2003                            |                | 33       | Kuwait  | Yasser al-Habib, writer |
|                                 | 2004           |          |         | <i>follow-up 3</i>      |
|                                 | 2004           |          |         | <i>follow-up 2</i>      |
|                                 | 2004           |          |         | <i>follow-up 1</i>      |

### *Announcement*

International PEN reports today that yesterday Kuwaiti writer Yasser al-Habib has been sentenced in absentia to fifteen years' imprisonment. Last November he was abducted in connection with an audiocassette recording of a lecture he gave on Islamic historical issues. Sentenced to one year in January, he was amnestied in February. Please see the NCH summary below and the new appeal by International PEN. We hope that you can send the recommended urgent appeals immediately. Please remember to write in your professional capacity.

### **NCH SUMMARY**

On 30 November 2003, Kuwaiti writer, journalist and researcher Yasser al-Habib (?1973–) was abducted in a Kuwait City street by security forces, reportedly in connection with an audiocassette recording of a lecture he gave on Islamic historical issues to an audience of ten to twenty people in a closed environment. His research reportedly relied heavily on Wahhabi references and texts and apparently angered hard-line Wahhabi groups who used their influence within the establishment, including the National Assembly, to bring about the maximum punishment against al-Habib. On 20 January 2004, he was sentenced to one year of imprisonment for “questioning the conduct and integrity of some of the ‘companions’ of the prophet Muhammad”. In frail health, he was reportedly subjected to orchestrated violent attacks in prison by Wahhabi inmates. Amnestied by the Emir on 25 February, Kuwaiti National Day, he was at risk of imminent re-arrest. On 9 March he was reportedly sentenced in absentia to fifteen years' imprisonment; his case was reportedly transferred to the State Security Court. (See NCH #33, #33ii, #33iii, 33#iv).

[Source: PEN, *Rapid Action Network 56/03*, 16 December 2003, 9 February, 2 & 10 March 2004.]

**INTERNATIONAL PEN WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE RAPID ACTION NETWORK**

10 March 2004—Update #3 to RAN 56/03

**KUWAIT: Grave concerns for the safety of writer, journalist and researcher Yasser al-Habib**

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN is gravely concerned for the safety of writer, journalist and researcher Yasser al-Habib, who is reported to have been sentenced in absentia by the Kuwait Criminal Court on 9 March 2004 to fifteen years in prison. His case is also said to have been transferred to the State Security Court. No further details of the new charges brought against him are known at this stage. Yasser al-Habib was amnestied by the Emir on 25 February 2004, Kuwaiti National Day, after being sentenced to one years' imprisonment on 20 January 2004 for defaming the companions of the prophet Muhammad in a lecture he had delivered. It is feared that elements within the Kuwaiti National Assembly have pressured the authorities to have his Amiri pardon over-turned. International PEN protests the fifteen-year prison sentence reportedly handed down to writer Yasser al-Habib on 9 March 2004, which appears to violate the Kuwaiti Constitution and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Kuwait is a signatory. PEN urges the Kuwaiti authorities to guarantee the safety and protection from re-arrest of writer Yasser al-Habib as a matter of urgency.

Yasser al-Habib, who has worked for several Arabic-language newspapers including the monthly al-Menbar (The Pulpit), was abducted on a Kuwait City street on the afternoon of 30 November 2003 by unknown individuals and taken away in an unmarked vehicle. His family was not informed that he had been detained by security forces until the following day. Al-Habib was arrested in connection with an audiocassette recording of a lecture he gave to an audience of 10-20 people in a closed environment on Islamic historical issues. His research is believed to have relied heavily on Wahhabi references and texts, and is said to have angered hard-line Wahhabi groups who have used their influence within the establishment to bring about the maximum punishment against al-Habib. Yasser al-Habib was released on 25 February 2004 as part of a prisoner amnesty to mark Kuwaiti National Day, but according to PEN's information the Wahhabi lobby within the National Assembly has pressurised the Minister of Justice to order al-Habib's re-arrest.

International PEN Writers in Prison Committee is deeply concerned about the fifteen-year prison sentence reportedly handed down to Kuwaiti writer, journalist and researcher Yasser al-Habib in absentia on 9 March 2004. PEN reminds the authorities of Kuwait of their obligations to uphold the official pardon offered to Yasser al-Habib on 25 February 2004 and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Kuwait is a signatory, and calls upon the authorities to take all necessary steps to guarantee his safety and protection from re-arrest as a matter of urgency.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS:**

Expressing grave concerns for the safety of writer, journalist and researcher Yasser al-Habib following the fifteen-year prison sentence reportedly handed down to him on 9 March 2004;

seeking guarantees that he will be protected from further arrest as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Kuwait is a signatory, and the official pardon given to him on 25 February 2004.

**APPEALS TO:**

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