

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 4</i>
	2004			<i>follow-up 3</i>
	2004			<i>follow-up 2</i>
	2004			<i>follow-up 1</i>

Announcement

International PEN reports that on 4 May 2004 Kuwaiti writer Yasser al-Habib, who remains in hiding, has been sentenced in absentia to 10 years' imprisonment (not 15 as previously reported). On 4 June, his home was raided. The events are connected with a lecture he gave on Islamic historical issues in 2003. 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 and went into hiding. On 9 March, new charges were brought against him of violating state security laws. On 5 May, he was reportedly sentenced in absentia by the Kuwait Criminal Court to ten years' imprisonment on charges attempting to overthrow the regime. On 4 June, a group of some twenty armed security guards reportedly raided al-Habib's family home in search of him and assaulted his father. (See NCH #33, #33ii, #33iii, #33iv).

[Sources: PEN, *Rapid Action Network 56/03*, 16 December 2003, 9 February, 2 & 10 March, 18 June 2004.]

RAPID ACTION NETWORK

18 June 2004--Update #4 to RAN 56/03

KUWAIT: Journalist and researcher Yasser al-Habib sentenced in absentia; serious concerns for safety.

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 5 May 2004 to ten years in prison on charges of attempting to overthrow the regime. He was sentenced to one years' imprisonment on 20 January 2004 for defaming the companions of the prophet Muhammad in a lecture he had delivered, but then released on 25 February 2004 as part of a prisoner amnesty to mark Kuwaiti National Day. On 9 March 2004 new charges were brought against him of violating state security laws (this replaces the previous report that he was sentenced in absentia on 9 March to 15 years in prison). Yasser al-Habib remains in hiding, and on 4 June 2004 a group of some twenty armed security guards reportedly raided al-Habib's family home in search of him and assaulted his father. International PEN fears for the safety of writer Yasser al-Habib, and is seriously concerned about the reported harassment of his family. PEN calls upon the Kuwaiti authorities to guarantee the safety of writer Yasser al-Habib and protect his family from further harassment 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. He was sentenced to one years' imprisonment on 20 January 2004 for defaming the companions of the prophet Muhammad in a lecture, but then released on 25 February 2004 as part of a prisoner amnesty to mark Kuwaiti National Day. According to PEN's information the Wahhabi lobby within the National Assembly pressurised the Minister of Justice to order al-Habib's re-arrest, and on 9 March 2004 new charges were brought against him under the National Security Laws. He was reportedly sentenced in absentia to ten years in prison on 5 May 2004 for attempting to overthrow the regime.

International PEN Writers in Prison Committee is deeply concerned about the ten-year prison sentence reportedly handed down to Kuwaiti writer, journalist and researcher Yasser al-Habib in absentia on 5 May 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 ten-year prison sentence reportedly handed down to him on 5 May 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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