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UA 41/07 Fear of torture or other ill-treatment/fear for safety

LIBYA Idriss Boufayed (m), aged 49
 Jum'a Boufayed (m)
 al-Mahdi Saleh Hmeed (m)
 Jamal al-Haji (m)
 and several others

A number of men have been arrested for planning a peaceful demonstration, and are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. One of them has had his father's house set on fire by young men allegedly working in collusion with the authorities.

Idriss Boufayed, who heads an organisation which regularly criticizes the government, was reportedly arrested at around 1am on 16 February by officers of the Internal Security Agency. His brother Jum'a was arrested a few hours later. Idriss Boufayed and several others had been planning a peaceful demonstration for 17 February to mark the anniversary of a police attack on a demonstration in the city of Benghazi, in which at least 12 people were shot dead and scores were injured.

Jum'a Boufayed described his brother's arrest in a telephone interview with the London-based Libya al-Mostakbal news website. He said that a group of armed men had called at the family home and broken down the door when nobody answered, and taken his brother away. He said that he had recognized the officer apparently in charge of the operation as the head of a local branch of the Internal Security Agency. Jum'a Boufayed said he did not know where they had taken his brother, and added that he feared he would be arrested too, because of the information he had revealed in the interview and other phone calls. He was reportedly arrested shortly afterwards.

Another man involved in the organization of the demonstration, al-Mahdi Saleh Hmeed, was reportedly arrested in the afternoon of 16 February. Earlier the same day, his father's house had reportedly been set on fire by a group of young men, allegedly colluding with the authorities, who reportedly also assaulted members of his family.

Idriss Boufayed and al-Mahdi Saleh Hmeed, along with two other men, Ahmed al-Abidi and Bashir Qasem al-Hares, had issued a communique to news websites announcing that they were planning a peaceful demonstration, to take place in the capital, Tripoli on 17 February, to commemorate the first anniversary of the killing of at least 12 people and the injuring of scores more when police opened fire on a demonstration in the city of Benghazi. The Libyan authorities said in 2006 that they had charged 10 senior officials in connection with the incident, but Amnesty International is not aware that any have yet been brought to trial.

Several others are feared to have been arrested in connection with the planned demonstration. They include writer Jamal al-Haji, who has not been seen by his

family since the evening of 15 February. He had given a telephone interview that day to the Libya al-Mostakbal website, in which he criticised the Libyan authorities.

Idriss Boufayed is the secretary general of the National Union of Reform - Nur, which he co-founded in 2004. It has been critical of the political situation in Libya. He had been recognized as a refugee in Switzerland, but returned to Libya in September 2006, reportedly after receiving assurances from the Libyan embassy in Bern that he would not be at risk from the authorities; earlier that year the embassy had issued him with a passport. However, he was arrested on 5 November and detained incommunicado until 29 December, when he was released, apparently without charge. Throughout this time, the authorities reportedly did not tell his family why he had been arrested or where he was held. Amnesty International wrote to the Libyan authorities in December to express concern that he might be a prisoner of conscience

On 15 January, Idriss Boufayed issued a public statement thanking all the national, regional and international organizations and individuals who had contributed to "his release from prison without restriction or condition" and pledging to continue the struggle for a "modern, democratic Libya".

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