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Twelve Others Remain in Detention, One Missing

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The Libyan governments release on May 27 of political prisoner Jum`a Boufayed, whose whereabouts were unknown for 15 months, is a welcome step, Human Rights Watch said today.

Security forces arrested Boufayed in February 2007 with 13 men who were planning a peaceful demonstration to protest police violence in Libya. Twelve of the men are on trial for attempting to overthrow the government, and one man has been missing since the arrest.

This is excellent news because for more than a year we feared Jum`a Boufayed might be dead, said Fred Abrahams, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch. We hope that the others arrested with him will also be free soon.

Boufayed's unexpected release was first reported on the Libyan website [al-Mostakbal](#), based in the United Kingdom, which has closely followed the case. The editor told Human Rights Watch that he spoke with Boufayed's family in Tripoli on May 28 and confirmed the release. The authorities gave no explanation for letting Boufayed go.

The detainee still unaccounted for is `Abd al-Rahman al-Qotaiwi, a fourth-year medical student, whom security officials arrested with Boufayed and the 12 other men.

We are relieved to hear of Jum`a Boufayed's release and hopefully `Abd al-Rahman al-Qotaiwi will be next, Abrahams said.

Another of the 13 detainees is Dr. Idris Boufayed, brother of Jum`a, who suffers from advanced cancer. A pro-government newspaper [al-Watan](#) reported on May 28 that an official medical committee had confirmed its consent for the release of [Idris] Boufayed on medical grounds.

It remains unclear if Idris Boufayed, who was the key organizer of the planned 2007 demonstration, will be released and, if so, whether to a hospital or his home. The identity and authority of the medical committee are unknown.

The Qadhafi Foundation run by Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi, son of Libyan leader Mu`ammar al-Qadhafi, has said it is working on Idris Boufayed's behalf, given his failing health.

In late April, the Boufayed family and its lawyer issued a statement in which the family thanked the Qadhafi Foundation for Idris's medical care. The statement said that the family was only interested in Idris's health and urged that his case not be used for political aims.

Libyan authorities arrested the group of men on February 15 and 16, 2007, before they could hold their planned demonstration in Tripoli. The demonstration was to commemorate the anniversary of a violent clash in February 2006 between demonstrators and police in Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city, in which at least 11 people died.

Jum`a Boufayed was apparently not one of the demonstration planners. Security agents arrested him a few hours after he gave an interview to the al-Mostakbal website about his brother Idris's arrest.

The men have been on trial over the past year for planning to overthrow the government, possession of arms, and meeting with an official from a foreign government. The next court session is reportedly set for mid-June.

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