

PUBLIC

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UA 233/07

Fear of torture or ill treatment/incommunicado detention/ possible prisoners of conscience

SAUDI ARABIA

Lulowa al-Dir'i (f)
Hila al-Husni (f)
Lulowa al-Husni (f)
Um 'Abdel Rahman al 'Awda (f)
Zainab al-Mikhlif (f)
Khowla al-Mikhlif (f)
Hila Ibrahim (f)
Tarfa Ibrahim (f)

The eight women named above, all relatives of political prisoners, were arrested on 2 September in Buraida in the al-Qassim region, north of the capital, Riyadh. According to reports, the women are being held incommunicado and may be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes that they may have been detained solely for the non-violent expression of their beliefs, and if so, would consider them to be prisoners of conscience.

The women were arrested in connection with a protest held on 1 September in Buraida against the prolonged detention of their relatives, who are suspected of being political opponents of the government, without charge or trial, and calling for them either to be released or tried in fair and public trials.

Lulowa al-Dir'i , Hila al-Husni, Lulowa al-Husni, Um 'Abdel Rahman al 'Awda , Zainab al-Mikhlif , Khowla al-Mikhlif , Hila Ibrahim, Tarfa Ibrahim were reported to have taken part in the protest, which was held outside the offices of the Governate of al-Qassim region in Buraida. They were all arrested by Members of *al-Mabahith al-Amma* (General Investigation), one of the main arresting authorities of political suspects under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior, and are reported to be held at the Women's Prison in Buraida.

In July 2007, another group consisting of five women protesters, all relatives of political detainees arrested between 2003 and 2007, were arrested in Buraida demanding a fair trial or release of their detained relatives. All five women were released without charge after a few days in detention (see UA 187/07, MDE 23/028/2007, 19 July 2007, and follow-up).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Critics of the state and suspected political opponents of the authorities are invariably subjected to gross violations of their rights with total disregard for international human rights standards and Saudi Arabia's own laws. Upon arrest, detainees are often subjected to lengthy incommunicado detention with all the risks of torture and ill-treatment this involves, indefinite detention without charge or trial, and denial of access to lawyers and the courts to challenge the legality of their detention. They may be released only after undertaking not to repeat what they were suspected of, even when this relates solely to the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and association. Political trials are rare, and invariably fall far short of international human rights standards for fair trial. Defendants are, as a rule, denied legal assistance, and in many cases they and their families are not informed of the progress of legal proceedings against them. Court hearings are often held behind closed doors. This pattern of human rights violations has been exacerbated by Saudi Arabia's pursuit of a "war on terror" policy with total disregard for international human rights standards and the rule of law, which has resulted in thousands of people being subjected to arrest and detention over the last six years. Amnesty International does not know how many are currently held, but according to reported statement by a Ministry of Interior source there are at least 3,000 political detainees

currently held without charge or trial. The Ministry is also reported to have disclosed that 9,000 political detainees have been arrested since 2003.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or English or your own language:

- expressing concern about the arrest of Lulowa al-Dir'i , Hila al-Husni, Lulowa al-Husni, Um 'Abdel Rahman al 'Awda , Zainab al-Mikhlif , Khowla al-Mikhlif , Hila Ibrahim, Tarfa Ibrahim;
- urging the authorities to ensure that they and the political detainees to whom they are related are protected from torture and given immediate and regular access to lawyers, families, and medical attention if necessary;
- asking for details of the charges against all those detained and any trial proceedings which are scheduled or have taken place;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release of all those detained if they are held solely for their support of the right of political detainees to be released or given a prompt and fair trial;
- expressing concern that Lulowa al-Dir'i , Hila al-Husni, Lulowa al-Husni, Um 'Abdel Rahman al 'Awda , Zainab al-Mikhlif , Khowla al-Mikhlif , Hila Ibrahim, Tarfa Ibrahim may be prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO:

King Abdullah Bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud
The Custodian of the two Holy Mosques
Office of His Majesty the King, Royal Court, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: (via Ministry of the Interior) **+966 1 403 1185**

Salutation: **Your Majesty**

His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior, P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road, Riyadh 11134, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: **+966 1 403 1185**

Salutation: **Your Royal Highness**

His Royal Highness Prince Saud al-Faisal bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nasseriya Street, Riyadh 11124, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: **+966 1 403 0645**

Salutation: **Your Royal Highness**

COPIES TO:

Mr Turki bin Khaled Al-Sudairy
President, Human Rights Commission, PO Box 58889, Riyadh 11515
King Fahad Road, Building No.373, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: **+966 1 4612061**

and to diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 October 2007.