

Theme leaflets (5)

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Saudi Arabia

No dissent allowed

### Political Prisoners

“Such will be the fate of anyone who breaches any aspect of our religion... or endangers the security enjoyed by this country...”

This statement was made by the Saudi Arabian Interior Ministry when announcing the execution of ‘Abdullah ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hudayf, a Saudi Arabian, in August 1995. ‘Abdullah ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hudayf had been charged with having connections with a banned opposition party and attacking a police officer. He was held incommunicado, denied access to a lawyer and convicted after a secret trial.

Saudi Arabia does not permit any criticism of the state. Vague laws on “sabotage” and “terrorism” are used to prosecute perceived government opponents. No political organizations are allowed. Even trade unions and independent bar associations are not allowed. Any challenge to official policy invariably results in retaliatory action involving the violation of basic human rights.

Over the years, thousands of people have been detained for their political beliefs or activities. Today, there are probably between 100 and 200 political prisoners, including possible prisoners of conscience, in Saudi Arabia’s jails. Political suspects are often arrested with unnecessary violence, tortured and held incommunicado for prolonged periods. Some have been executed. Others have fled the country on their release fearing further persecution.

Sheikh Salman bin Fahd al-‘Awda and Sheikh Safr ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali were arrested in September 1994 for their religious and political opposition activities. Following their arrest, the Interior Ministry stated:

“Security forces have arrested... [them] after about one year of attempts to convince... [them] to repent their extremist ideas... which threaten the unity of the Islamic society in the Kingdom, or to stop giving such speeches, holding conferences and distributing tapes...”

They were released in June 1999, apparently without charge or trial.

Members of religious minorities are not able to practice freely their beliefs in public and are at risk of arbitrary arrest, detention and deportation even if they do so in private. Shi‘a Muslims risk arrest if they possess Shi‘a religious books or commemorate Shi‘a religious events. Those promoting rights for Shi‘a Muslims have been detained and tortured. Christians and members of other faiths have also been targeted. In October 1999, 13 Filipinos were arrested while participating in private Christian services. They were held incommunicado for a few weeks before being released without charge or trial. Amnesty International believes they were prisoners of conscience, held like many others solely for the peaceful expression of their conscientiously held beliefs.

[box text]

Waleed al-Sinani, a father of six, has reportedly been in detention without trial since his arrest in 1995. Amnesty International fears that his arrest was related to his political beliefs, in particular statements he had made concerning the government and human rights. He may be a prisoner of conscience.

Write to the Saudi Arabian authorities and ask them to:

\* Clarify the reasons for the

- detention of Waleed al-Sinani.
- \* Decriminalize acts relating to the peaceful expression of conscientiously held beliefs.
- \* Release all those held for the peaceful expression of their conscientiously held beliefs.
- \* Review the cases of all political prisoners sentenced after unfair trials.
- \* Ensure fair and prompt trials for all those who are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.
- \* Eliminate torture and ill-treatment.

Addresses:

His Excellency Dr ‘Abdullah bin  
 Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh  
 Minister of Justice  
 Ministry of Justice  
 University Street  
 Riyadh 11137  
 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin  
 ‘Abdul ‘Aziz  
 Minister of the Interior  
 Ministry of the Interior  
 PO Box 2933  
 Airport Road  
 Riyadh 11134  
 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Every day people in Saudi Arabia suffer violations of their basic human rights. Their suffering is perpetuated and hidden by a system based on secrecy and fear, and is largely ignored by the world’s governments.

Anyone who dares voice dissent is likely to be imprisoned. Women face systemic discrimination. Anyone not in a position of influence is at risk of arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly members of religious minorities and those deemed to have broken the country’s strict moral codes.

People are arrested with little or no explanation. They are denied access to a lawyer. They are tortured and ill-treated. They are convicted after secret and summary trials, sometimes solely on the basis of confessions extracted under duress. They face punishments including execution, amputation and flogging and in all cases have no meaningful right of appeal.

The Saudi Arabian government refuses to allow outside scrutiny of its human rights record and has ignored Amnesty International’s many requests for information, constructive dialogue or implementation of reforms that would protect human rights.

Amnesty International is stepping up the pressure. It is issuing a series of documents to highlight the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia and to demand action from the authorities and the international community to put an end to the secrecy and suffering in Saudi Arabia.

Please join us! Your help is needed.  
 Captions

Front photos: Sheikh Salman bin Fahd al-‘Awda © CDLR; Sheikh Safr ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali © CDLR

Left: Sheikh Salman bin Fahd al-‘Awda © CDLR

Right: Sheikh Safr 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali © CDLR  
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