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## **Saudi Arabia must release or charge detained peaceful protesters**

Some 15 Saudi Arabian men detained on Tuesday must be released unless they are charged with a recognizable criminal offence, Amnesty International said following their arrest during a peaceful protest at the continued detention and ill-treatment of relatives.

Police arrested the men outside the offices of the Human Rights Commission in the capital Riyadh.

According to eyewitness accounts, 22 women and eight children were also detained for taking part in the protest. They were later released.

"The Saudi Arabian authorities must release all those detained on Tuesday's protest or charge them with recognizable criminal offences if there are legitimate reasons for doing so," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Participating in a peaceful protest or appearing to criticize state authorities for the treatment of detained relatives would never be a legitimate reason for arrest and detention."

One woman who took part in Tuesday's protest told Amnesty International that they were protesting the "prolonged detention of our detained relatives without charge or trial, the ill-treatment they are subjected to in detention and the lack of medical attention they receive. My husband has been urinating blood for six months and has not had treatment."

Another woman said, "I have been protesting the detention of my husband, who has been detained for 12 years. He has been found innocent but not released. I have not seen or been able to call him for six months and I want to know where he is and if he is alive or dead."

Tuesday's protest started at 12:30 in the afternoon. Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that police and security forces arrived 20 minutes later. They cordoned off the area and threatened the demonstrators to either leave or risk detention.

"We refused to leave and one man was beaten and his clothes were torn apart when the security officers attempted to arrest him, and a woman was kicked by security officers", said one eyewitness.

"We tried to get the names of the members of the security forces but they ripped their names off their uniforms. They did not want us to know who they were."

The protesters were put onto buses and taken to the Criminal Investigation Department where they gave their statements before being taken for interrogation at the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution.

"One woman protester who has cancer became unable to continue the interrogation; she became breathless and started shaking, but they continued to interrogate her," an eyewitness told Amnesty International.

“The women and children were then released only after they were made to sign an undertaking that they would not protest again and would be punished if they did.”