

PUBLIC

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20 March 2009

UA 80/09 Incommunicado detention/ Fear of torture or other ill treatment/ possible prisoners of conscience

SAUDI ARABIA Muhammad 'Ali Muhammad al-Sfawani (m)]
Hassan Muhammad al-Sadiq (m)]
Qassim Muhammad al-Mawsi (m)] aged 14-16
Muhammad 'Arif Muhammad al-Dahim (m)]
'Abdullah Muhammad al-Khalaf (m)]
Mustafa Muhammad al-Fardan (m)]
Nouh 'Ali Salih 'Abdul Jabbar (m), aged 28
Makki Al-'Abbas (m), aged about 40

The eight people named above, including six juveniles, are all members of the minority Shi'a community in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. They are being held in incommunicado detention and are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

They were arrested following demonstrations in the Eastern Province that were held in protest against the arrest of Shi'a visitors to the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in the city of Madina in the west of Saudi Arabia by security forces in February 2009. If they are detained solely for taking part in a peaceful protest, Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience.

The six juveniles, all aged between 14 and 16, were arrested between 4 and 8 March 2009, and are held in a children's home in al-Khober, Eastern Province. Most, if not all of them, are reported to be denied visits by their families. According to information received by Amnesty International, they were arrested because they took part in a protest on 27 February 2009 in Safwa, Eastern Province, regarding the incident in Madina, and may also have been suspected of throwing stones at security forces.

Nouh 'Ali Salih 'Abdul Jabbar and Makki Al-'Abbas were arrested following a gathering in al-'Awamiya, Eastern Province, on 19 March 2009. Their current whereabouts are said to be unknown to their families. The gathering was held in protest against an order issued for the arrest of Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Namr, a leading Shi'a cleric and mosque imam in al-'Awamiya. The reason for the arrest order is said to be related to his criticism of the attacks on Shi'a visitors to the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad and the general religious intolerance against the Shi'a community in Saudi Arabia.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The vast majority of Saudi Arabian citizens are Sunni Muslims and the official creed of the state is the Wahhabi doctrine of Islam. The state considers Shi'a Islam to be incompatible with Wahhabi Islam and imposes restrictions on its practice.

The Saudi Arabian authorities regularly hold detainees incommunicado, where they are frequently tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Demonstrations are not allowed in Saudi Arabia. Those who defy this ban are often held incommunicado without charge, denied access to the courts to challenge the legality of their detention, and may be tortured.

In February 2009, members of the Committee for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue (CPVPV), also known as the *Mutawa'een* or religious police, took video footage of Shi'a women who were visiting the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Madina. This angered a wider group of Shi'a men and women visiting the tomb and led to them protesting outside the offices of the CPVPV in Madina to request the handover of the footage. The situation escalated into a series of clashes when members of the CPVPV attacked the protesters; a number of the protesters were injured and at least nine were arrested but released after about one week in detention. According to Minister of Interior Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud, some individuals from the Sunni community were arrested too.

On 14 March 2009, reporting on the arrests of people involved in the incident, the Minister of the Interior was quoted as saying: "Citizens have both rights and duties; their activities should not contradict the doctrine followed by the Ummah. It is the doctrine of Sunnis and our righteous forefathers. There are citizens who follow other schools of thought and the intelligent among them must respect this doctrine."

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

- expressing concern that Muhammad 'Ali Muhammad al-Sfawani, Hassan Muhammad al-Sadiq, Qassim Muhammad al-Mawsi, Muhammad 'Arif Muhammad al-Dahim, 'Abdullah Muhammad al-Khalaf, Mustafa Muhammad al-Fardan, Nouh 'Ali Salih 'Abdul Jabbar and Makki Al-'Abbas are held incommunicado, and are therefore at risk of torture or other ill-treatment;
- urging the authorities to ensure that they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment;
- calling on them to ensure that they are given regular access to their families and lawyers, and any medical attention they may require;
- calling on the authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally if they are being held solely for taking part in peaceful protests.

APPEALS TO:

His Majesty 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 (please keep trying)

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 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

COPIES TO:

Mr Bandar Mohammed Abdullah Al Aiban

President

Human Rights Commission

P.O. Box 58889, King Fahad Road, Building No. 373

Riyadh 11515, 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 1 May 2009.