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Saudi Arabia urged to allow prisoner of conscience to visit ill mother



Dr Saud al-Hashimi's mother, Khairiya Yasin Saqqa, 70, in her hospital bed in Jeddah © Private

The Saudi Arabian authorities should urgently allow imprisoned human rights activist Dr Saud al-Hashimi to visit his seriously ill mother in hospital, Amnesty International said today.

Saud al-Hashimi's mother, Khairiyya Yasin Saqqa, who is around 70 years old and suffers from high blood pressure and diabetes, is currently hospitalized in Jeddah. Her health deteriorated significantly on 11 October, when she was reported to have fallen into a coma lasting at least five days. She is now said to be waking for between five to 30 minutes at a time, crying out to be allowed to see her son in the belief that she is dying.

Saud al-Hashimi's family have requested that he be allowed to see his mother, but the Saudi Arabian authorities have reportedly so far refused to grant him permission.

In November 2011, Saud al-Hashimi, 49, was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment, a 30-year travel ban following his release and a fine of 2 million riyals (approximately US\$534,000) after being convicted on, among other charges, disobeying Saudi Arabia's king, forming an organization opposing the state, questioning the independence of the judiciary, money laundering and "supporting terrorism". An appeal trial is believed to be ongoing.

Amnesty International considers Saud al-Hashimi to be a prisoner of conscience, who, in addition to being allowed to visit his mother, should be released immediately and unconditionally. It believes that the trial proceedings in his case were grossly unfair and that the charges, despite the apparently serious nature of some of them, related merely to the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association.

He was tried with 15 others, who received from five to 22 years of imprisonment and travel bans between 10 and 20 years after release. He and eight other activists, lawyers and

academics were arrested in February 2007, accused by the Interior Ministry of collecting money to support terrorism, after they met to discuss setting up a human rights association and had circulated a petition calling for political reform.

In late 2010, Dr Saud al-Hashimi went on hunger strike in Dhahban Prison for over a week. As punishment for his protest, he was reported to have been tortured; he was stripped of all his clothes, except his underwear, shackled and dragged from his cell, placed in a severely cold cell for about five hours, and forced to sign a “confession”.

Earlier this week, Saudi Arabian activists created a hash-tag to campaign for Saud al-Hashimi’s release: #freedom_to_Saud_Mukhtar (#مختار_لسعود_الحرية). Amnesty International is adding its voice to these activists’ calls.