

URGENT ACTION

SAUDI ARABIAN TEACHER ARRESTED FOR PROTEST

A 25-year-old teacher was arrested on 4 March during a protest held in Riyadh calling for reform. On 2 March, a video of him calling for protests in support of the fall of the monarchy was posted on YouTube. Amnesty International is concerned that he may be held solely for the peaceful expression of his right to freedom of expression and may therefore be a prisoner of conscience.

Muhammad al-Wad'ani was arrested by men in plain clothes, believed to be members of General Intelligence during a protest outside the al-Rajhi mosque in the eastern part of the capital, Riyadh. They were reported to have called out the word "Shi'a" when they arrested him, suggesting they believed he was a member of the Shi'a minority. Some 20-30 people were said to have taken part in the protest, which called for reform in the Kingdom. Three other men were also said to have been arrested; their names are not known to Amnesty International, but they were said to have been released shortly afterwards.

Mohamed al-Wad'ani is detained incommunicado and as such is at particular risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Activists in Saudi Arabia suspect that he is being detained at al-Ha'ir prison in Riyadh.

In the video posted on YouTube, he was seen calling for protests on 4 and 7 March in Riyadh. He called for the fall of the monarchy and warned the Minister of Interior of the consequences of underestimating the power of the youth and of arresting and detaining them without charge or trial. Very little information is currently available to Amnesty International about Muhammad al-Wad'ani's background, including whether he is a member of the Shi'a minority or not.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to ensure that Muhammad al-Wad'ani is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to his family, lawyers and any medical attention he may require;
- Noting that if he is being held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and association, Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience and call for his immediate and unconditional release;
- Asking for details of any charges he faces to be made public and calling on the authorities to ensure that any legal proceedings against him conforms to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 APRIL 2011 TO:

Second Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of the Interior
His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin
'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud, Ministry of the
Interior, P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road
Riyadh 11134
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
**Fax: +966 1 403 3125 (please keep
trying)**
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

King
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 3125 (please keep trying)**
Salutation: Your Majesty

And copies to:

President, Human Rights Commission
Bandar Mohammed 'Abdullah al-Aiban
Human Rights Commission
P.O. Box 58889, King Fahad Road,
Building No. 373, Riyadh 11515
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Email: hrc@haq-ksa.org
Salutation: Dear Dr al-Aiban

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Although Amnesty International is not aware of any legal text banning demonstrations, in practice the Saudi Arabian authorities have generally not tolerated them taking place. Those who try to organize or participate in them are often arrested, held incommunicado without charge and denied access to the courts to challenge the legality of their detention.

After a protest against the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip launched on 27 December 2008, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior was reported as making an explicit announcement on 30 December 2008 that protests in the Saudi Arabia were banned. Following the protests last week in al-Qatif (see *Protesters arrested in Saudi Arabia*, 7 March 2011, UA 61/11, Index: MDE23/005/2011) and amid reports that protests calling for reform in Saudi Arabia will take place on 11 March, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement on 5 March confirming the ban on demonstrations in the Kingdom. According to the statement, security forces would take "all necessary measures" against those who attempt to disrupt order.

The following day, on 6 March, the Council of Senior Ulema (religious scholars) also emphasized the prohibition of demonstrations in the country. They forbade and warned against using demonstrations or other means that, according to them, stir discord and division in society and stated that these were not the appropriate means for calling for reform or giving advice. On the same day the Shura Council (a consultative council appointed by the King) stressed the importance of preserving the security of the Kingdom and ignoring misleading calls for the organization of demonstrations, sit-ins and marches, which, they argued, were incompatible with the principles of Islamic law.

Critics of the Saudi Arabian government face gross human rights violations at the hands of security forces under the control of the Ministry of Interior. They are often held incommunicado without charge, sometimes in solitary confinement, prevented from consulting lawyers and denied access to the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Torture or other ill-treatment is frequently used to extract confessions from detainees, to punish them for refusing to "repent", or to force them to make undertakings not to criticize the government. Incommunicado detention in Saudi Arabia often lasts until a confession is obtained, which can take months and occasionally years.

Saudi Arabia is a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which prohibits the use of evidence extracted under torture or other ill-treatment. Article 15 states: "Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made."

The vast majority of Saudi Arabian citizens are Sunni Muslims and the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam is the official version followed by the state. The public practice of faiths other than Sunni Islam is not tolerated in Saudi Arabia. Even when practising their faiths in private members of other faiths are at risk of persecution. The state considers Shi'a Islam to be incompatible with the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam and imposes restrictions on its practice. Members of the Shi'a Muslim community may face arbitrary arrest and detention, and fear of prosecution prevents them from practising their faith freely. Those detained are frequently held without charge, and may face torture or other ill-treatment.

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