

URGENT ACTION

SAUDI SHI'A CLERIC ARRESTED

Saudi Arabian Shi'a cleric Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr was arrested on 3 August. He may be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr was arrested in the evening of 3 August, while he was on his way home from a mosque in the city of al-Hafouf, al-Ahsa governorate. His family did not know where he was until 8 August, when they found out he was detained in a police station in the west of the city of Dammam and were allowed to visit him. He had been detained incommunicado in solitary confinement until then. He is reported to have been held for "inciting public opinion" in statements he had made in his sermons during Friday prayers.

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr was reported to have received a letter from the authorities a few days before he was arrested telling him to report to them, but without giving any reason. Apparently he did not report to them.

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr is a Shi'a cleric in al-Ahsa governorate. He had previously been arrested on 27 February following a sermon he gave calling for reforms in Saudi Arabia. During his sermon on 25 February he had expressed the need for reform in Saudi Arabia, including a constitutional monarchy, fair distribution of jobs, and an end to discrimination against religious minorities. He was released without charge on 6 March, after a week detained incommunicado. His most recent arrest is also believed to be linked to his continuing calls for reform.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Expressing concern that Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr may be held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and association and that, if so, Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience and call for his immediate and unconditional release;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to his family, lawyer and any medical attention he may require;
- Asking them to publish details of any charges he faces and ensure that any legal proceedings against him conform to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 SEPTEMBER 2011 TO:

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

Governor of Eastern Province
Prince Muhammad bin Fahd bin Abdul-
Aziz Al Saud
Eastern Province
King Abdel-Aziz Street
Dammam 31179
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 3 833 4000
Email: info@sharqiah.gov.sa
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

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

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**



URGENT ACTION

SAUDI SHI'A CLERIC ARRESTED

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr was arrested and briefly detained around three years ago, apparently in connection with an art exhibition he organized for the Shi'a festival of Ashura, and detained for about three days. He was arrested again about two years ago, seemingly in connection with his practice of certain aspects of the Shi'a faith, and detained for about 10 days. Sometime after his release he was brought before a court accused of incitement against the government. The trial was adjourned to allow the prosecution time to provide evidence to substantiate the claim. Nothing is known to have happened with the case since.

Critics of the Saudi Arabian government face gross human rights violations. 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 are 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.

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.

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 a week. According to Minister of Interior Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al Saud, some members of the Sunni community were arrested too. The incident sparked demonstrations in the Eastern Province, following which at least 10 members of the Shi'a community were arrested and detained.

On 14 March 2009, reporting on the arrests of members of the Shi'a community, the Minister of the Interior stated: "Citizens have both rights and duties; their activities should not contradict the doctrine followed by the Ummah [Muslim community]. 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."

For more information on Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr's detention in February and March 2011 see www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/004/2011 and www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/006/2011

Name: Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr

Gender m/f: M

UA: 242/11 Index: MDE 23/020/2011 Issue Date: 11 August 2011