

URGENT ACTION

WOMEN ACTIVISTS ON TRIAL

On 13 March 2019, 11 women activists were brought to trial at the Criminal Court in Riyadh after being detained without charge since May 2018. The women were charged with contacting international organizations, including Amnesty International, foreign media and other activists. Some of the women were also charged with promoting women's rights and calling for the end of the male guardianship system. The activists have had no access to their lawyers throughout their detention. Amnesty calls on the Saudi authorities to drop these charges and release the women activists, and others who remain detained without charge, immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*His Majesty King Salman 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: +966 11 403 3125*

Your Majesty King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud,

Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Amal al-Harbi, Dr. Ruqayyah al-Mharib, Nouf Abdulaziz, Maya'a al-Zahrani, Shadan al-Anezi, Dr. Abir Namankni, Dr. Hatoon al-Fassi and another woman are among a group of Saudi Arabian activists who were detained following a sweeping wave of arrests since May 2018. Many of the women activists brought to trial have campaigned against the long-standing ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia, and for the end of the male guardianship system. On 13 March 2019, several of the women activists were charged with contacting international organizations, including Amnesty International, journalists and other activists.

Up until the first trial session on 13 March, the women activists remained in detention without charge. They were detained incommunicado with no access to their families or lawyers during the first three months of their detention. Several women were subjected to sexual violence and other forms of torture and ill-treatment.

I urge you to drop all charges against all 11 women activists, and to release them immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, solely detained for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, assembly and association. I also urge you to allow all those detained to access their lawyers, and to allow independent monitors into the prisons to investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment including sexual abuse.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since May 2018, at least 15 activists, including several women human rights defenders have been detained without charge in Saudi Arabia. On 19 May, the Saudi Press Agency reported that seven individuals have been arrested for their “suspicious contact with foreign entities”, “recruiting people working in sensitive government positions” and “providing financial support to hostile entities abroad with the aim of undermining the security and stability of the Kingdom and shaking the country’s social fabric”. Amongst those targeted are prominent women human rights defenders Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan and Aziza al-Yousef, who faced accusations in state-aligned media which include violating Royal Decree 44/A, a follow-up decree to the 2014 counter-terrorism law, through forming a “cell” and posing a threat to state security for their “contact with foreign entities with the aim of undermining the country’s stability and social fabric”. Royal Decree 44/A has previously been invoked in the trial of human rights defenders. In a previous case the prosecutor has sought the maximum possible punishment for the charges, which according to Royal Decree 44/A carries up to 20 years in prison for, among other things, “affiliation with religious and intellectual extremist groups or groups that are classified as terrorist organizations nationally, regionally or internationally”.

In July 2018, two prominent women human rights defenders - Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sada - were also arbitrarily detained. In June 2018 the authorities detained women’s rights activists Nouf Abdulaziz and Maya’a al-Zahrani, and activists who have previously been persecuted for their human rights work, such as Mohammed al-Bajadi and Khalid al-Omeir. Hatoon al-Fassi, a prominent women’s rights activist and academic was also reportedly detained a few days after Saudi Arabia lifted the driving ban in June 2018.

In November 2018, reports emerged that several activists, including several women arbitrarily detained since May 2018, were reportedly tortured, subjected to sexual violence and otherwise ill-treated during the first three months of their detention. (See [Press Release](#): Saudi Arabia: Reports of torture and sexual harassment of detained activist)

The wave of arrests in May 2018 is emblematic of an ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, and continued stifling of freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Since early 2018, several human rights defenders have been tried before the Specialized Criminal Court and handed down harsh prison sentences, as well as social media and travel bans under provisions of the counter-terror law, its follow up decrees and the Anti-Cyber Crime law for their peaceful human rights activism (See [Press Release](#): Saudi Arabia: First human rights defenders sentenced under leadership of ‘reformer’ Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman)

On 14 March 2019, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the Universal Periodic Review outcome on Saudi Arabia in a mechanism to scrutinize the country’s human rights record. Despite promises of reform during the meeting in Geneva, women activists remain in detention. (See [Public Statement](#): Saudi Arabia: Human Rights Defenders Remain in Detention Despite Promises of Reform).

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Arabic

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 29 April 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Amal al-Harbi, Dr. Ruqayyah al-Mharib, Nouf Abdulaziz, Maya’a al-Zahrani, Shadan al-Anezi, Dr. Abir Namankni, Dr. Hatoon al-Fassi (preferred pronouns: She/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/8478/2018/en/>