

PUBLIC

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Prisoners of conscience/Torture

SAUDI ARABIA

Dr Abdullah al-Hamid (m), academic
'Issa al-Hamid (m), his brother

Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and his brother, 'Issa al-Hamid, have been sentenced to four and six months' imprisonment respectively for "incitement to protest". They had supported a peaceful demonstration by women outside the prison in Buraida in which the women called for their relatives, who are political detainees, to be charged and given fair trials, or else released. The two brothers are due to start their prison sentences on 8 March; if they are imprisoned, Amnesty International would consider them prisoners of conscience.

The court also ruled that they should undertake not to incite the women to protest again. A number of the women were arrested, but released shortly afterwards. Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and 'Issa al-Hamid were arrested at the same time, and released on bail after four days. They were later tried by a criminal court in the town of Buraida, where most of the protests took place. In prison they will be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Dr Abdullah al-Hamid was previously detained from 2004 to 2005 along with a number of government critics who had been campaigning for the right to freedom of expression and respect for the rights of detainees. He is one of a number of people reported recently to have called on the King to end the impunity for human rights abuses enjoyed by officials of the Ministry of Interior.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Critics of the state are subject to gross violations of their rights at the hands of various security forces under the control of the Ministry of Interior. They are often held incommunicado without charge or trial, denied access to lawyers and the courts to challenge the legality of their detention, and tortured. Trials fall far short of international standards for fair trial: defendants are generally denied legal counsel, and in many cases they and their families are not informed of the progress of legal proceedings against them. Court hearings are often held behind closed doors.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have used the so-called "war on terror" to justify the arrest and detention of thousands of government critics and opponents without charge or trial. In a statement in 2007 the Ministry of Interior announced that there are at least 3,000 political opponents held without charge or trial. The Ministry is also reported to have disclosed that they detained 9,000 people between 2003 and 2007 as part of the "war on terror".

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

- calling on the authorities not to imprison Dr Abdullah al-Hamid or his brother 'Issa al-Hamid;
- calling on them to declare the men's conviction and sentences null and void, as they have been convicted of "offences" which are no more than the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO:

Diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia accredited to your country.

COPIES TO:

Mr Turki bin Khaled Al-Sudairy
The President
The Human Rights Commission,
PO Box 58889, Riyadh 11515
King Fahad Road
Building No.373
Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 1 4612061

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 April 2008.