URGENT ACTION

WEBSITE FOUNDER'S CASE BEFORE APPEAL COURT

The case of Raif Badawi, a man who set up a website in Saudi Arabia, has now come before an appeal court. Amnesty International considers Raif Badawi a prisoner of conscience.

Raif Badawi (25), founder of a website for political and social debate, "Saudi Arabian Liberals", has been detained since 17 June 2012 in a prison in Briman, in Jeddah. He was charged with "setting up a website that undermines general security" and ridiculing Islamic religious figures. His trial began in June 2012 in the District Court in Jeddah, and was marred by irregularities. According to his lawyer, the original trial judge was replaced by a judge who had advocated that Raif Badawi be punished for "apostasy". His lawyer contested the judge's impartiality in the case. The case is currently before an appeal court to determine whether the case should be heard by the District Court in Jeddah or another tribunal, in particular the General Court in Jeddah, to which it was previously referred.

The charges against Raif Badawi relate to a number of articles he has written, including one about Valentine's Day – the celebration of which is prohibited in Saudi Arabia. He was accused of ridiculing Saudi Arabia's Commission on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (also known as the religious police) in the conclusion of his article. The charges against him also mention his failure to remove articles by other people on his website, including one insinuating that the al-Imam Mohamed ibn Saud University had become "a den for terrorists".

On 17 December, the District Court in Jeddah referred the case to the General Court in Jeddah, recommending that he should be tried for "apostasy". On 22 December the General Court in Jeddah had Raif Badawi sign documents to enable his trial for "apostasy" to proceed. On 21 January the General Court sent the case back to the District Court stating that they did not have jurisdiction to review his case and that they had found that he had not insulted Islam and therefore it did not amount to an "apostasy" charge. On 17 February the District Court again considered that it did not have jurisdiction to review the case, while the prosecutor continued to call for the "apostasy" charge. Raif Badawi's lawyer asked for him to be released during this time, but this was denied. Raif Badawi was taken to hospital for treatment on 28 December and found to have developed diabetes.

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

- Calling on the authorities to release Raif Badawi immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging the authorities to drop all charges against him and desist from charging and convicting people for "apostasy", as it violates the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 MAY 2013 TO:

King and Prime Minister
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

Minister of the Interior
His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin 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

And copies to:
Minister of Justice
Shaykh Dr Mohammed bin Abdul Kareem Al-Issa
Ministry of Justice
University Street, Riyadh 11137
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 1 401 1741 / +966 1 402 0311
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 3/13. Further information: http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/001/2013

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities have recently targeted a number of human rights defenders and critics, both through the courts and through arbitrary measures such as the imposition of travel bans. Court proceedings in Saudi Arabia fall far short of international standards for fair trial. Defendants are rarely allowed formal representation by a lawyer, and in many cases are not informed of the progress of legal proceedings against them. They may be convicted solely on the basis of confessions obtained under duress or deception.

In Saudi Arabia, the death penalty is applied for a wide range of offences, including "apostasy". The criminalization of "apostasy" is incompatible with the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Amnesty International has documented cases in Saudi Arabia where people whose comments were deemed contrary to Islam have at times been considered to be tantamount to being apostates and as such sentenced to death.

In the past two years alone, several people who have written comments on Twitter and/or other social media have been arrested and accused of "apostasy". One of them, Hamza Kashgari, left Saudi Arabia on 6 February 2012 amid death threats after some clerics accused him of "apostasy" following statements he posted on Twitter which they deemed to be insulting towards the Prophet Muhammad. A day after he left the country, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud ordered the Ministry of Interior to arrest Hamza Kashgari and hold him accountable for the statements he had made. The Malaysian authorities, who did not charge Hamza Kashgari with any recognizably criminal offence, arrested him on 9 February when he went to the airport to fly to New Zealand. They handed him over to the Saudi Arabian authorities in spite of calls from local and international organizations not to forcibly return him to Saudi Arabia. He has been detained since then.

Amnesty International detailed the crackdown on freedom of expression and protests in the name of security in a report, *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security* (Index: MDE 23/016/2011), 1 December 2011 (http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/016/2011/en).

See also the press release on the crackdown on activists, *Saudi Arabia ramps up clampdown on human rights activists*, issued on 18 June 2012, (http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/saudi-arabia-ramps-clampdown-human-rights-activists-2012-06-18) and the press release on Raif Badawi, *Saudi Arabia uses capital offence of 'apostasy' to stifle debate,* issued on 24 December 2012, (http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/saudi-arabia-uses-capital-offence-apostasy-stifle-debate-2012-12-24).

Name: Raif Badawi
Gender m/f: m