

PUBLIC

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UA 145/09 Medical concern/prisoner of conscience
SAUDI ARABIA 'Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna (m), aged 64, retired mayor

'Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna, a retired mayor of al-Khober, a city in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, is being detained in al-Khober Police Station after holding Friday prayers at his home for members of the Shi'a community. On 25 May, he was asked by the police to present himself at the police station and was arrested upon arrival there. He is detained because he refused to sign an undertaking not to hold prayers at home again. Amnesty International considers 'Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna to be a prisoner of conscience.

'Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna was first informed a year ago by the authorities not to hold Friday prayers at his home without obtaining permission from the authorities in advance. Since then he and other members of the Shi'a community in Eastern Province have repeatedly requested permission from the authorities, on the one hand, to conduct religious services and, on the other, to construct a mosque in which to do so. According to sources in Saudi Arabia the authorities did not respond to any of the requests that were submitted and 'Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna decided to continue to hold prayers at his home.

On or around 7 June, 'Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna found himself unable to move his fingers. He suffers from pre-existing health issues, including a heart condition, diabetes and high blood pressure. When he asked for medical attention, officers at the police station told him that he could be taken to hospital, but only if he was shackled, which he refused. He is not known to have been provided with medical attention at the police station. There continues to be fears for his health.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 practicing 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 practicing their faith freely. Those detained are frequently held without charge, and may face torture or other ill-treatment.

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. 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."

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

- calling on the authorities to provide 'Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna with medical attention without delay;

- stating that Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his religious beliefs, and urging the authorities therefore to release him immediately and unconditionally;
- calling on the authorities to allow 'Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna the opportunity to challenge the legality of his detention;
- expressing concern that he is being subjected to discrimination on the ground of his religious background.

APPEALS TO:

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 1185 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Majesty

His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud

Minister of the Interior

Ministry of the Interior

P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road

Riyadh 11134, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: +966 1 403 1185 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

His Royal Highness Prince Saud al-Faisal bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Nasseriya Street

Riyadh 11124

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: +966 1 403 0645

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

COPIES TO:

Mr Bandar Mohammed Abdullah Al Aiban

President

Human Rights Commission

P.O. Box 58889, King Fahad Road, Building No. 373

Riyadh 11515, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: +966 1 4612061

and to diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 July.