

PUBLIC

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UA 132/08 Incommunicado detention/Fear of torture and other ill-treatment

SAUDI ARABIA Dr Matrouk al-Faleh

Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh, an academic and human rights activist, was arrested in the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh, on 19 May 2008. He is held incommunicado at the General Investigation (al-Mabahith al-'Ammah) and is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Members of the General Investigation unit of the Ministry of the Interior (al-Mabahith al-'Ammah) arrested Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh at the university where he teaches. His family were informed late on 19 May and have so far not been given access to visit or talk with him.

Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh had been acting as legal representative for the brothers Isaa and Dr Abdullah al-Hamid (For further information see previous UA AI Index: MDE 23/009/2008, 6 March 2008, and UA update, UA 62/08, 11 March 2008, AI Index: MDE 23/10/2008). The brothers are serving prison sentences of six and four months' respectively. They were found guilty of "incitement to protest", charges that were brought against them after they supported and took part in a peaceful demonstration outside Buraida prison, north of Riyadh, by women relatives of political detainees held at the prison. The demonstrators called for their relatives to be charged and given fair trials, or else released.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have not disclosed publicly the reason for Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh's arrest but it may be connected to the publication on 17 May of an article he wrote following his visit to al- Buraida prison in which he referred to Dr Abdullah and Issa al-Hamid, and criticised their harsh and overcrowded prison conditions.

Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh was previously arrested in March 2004 after calling for political reform, and was sentenced to six years imprisonment in May 2005 on charges that included "sowing dissent and disobeying the ruler." He was released after being granted a royal pardon by King Abdullah on 8 August 2005. Since his release he has not been permitted to travel abroad.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights activists and critics of the state are subject to gross violations of their rights at the hands of the 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 regularly hold detainees incommunicado, at which time they are at risk of being tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Critics of the state are routinely detained indefinitely without charge or trial. Defendants are often denied the right to formal representation by a lawyer and in many cases they and their families are not informed of the progress of legal proceedings against them. Due to the high level of secrecy of the Saudi Arabian justice system, trials are invariably held behind closed doors. In the rare instances when individuals are charged and brought to trial, the proceedings invariably fail to meet the most elementary standards of fairness.

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

- expressing concern that Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh is being held incommunicado, where he is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment;
- seeking assurances from the authorities that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment;
- calling for him to be given regular access to his family, lawyers of his choice and any medical attention he may require;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release if he is being held solely for his human rights work.

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
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
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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 Turki bin Khaled Al-Sudairy
The President
The Human Rights Commission
PO Box 58889, Riyadh 11515
King Fahad Road
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Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
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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 1 July 2008