

URGENT ACTION

AL-BAJADY SEES FAMILY, NEEDS MEDICAL ATTENTION

Prisoner of conscience Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady, who had been held incommunicado since 19 September 2012, was finally granted a family visit on 7 July. He had been on hunger strike for over nine months, during which time he was ill-treated. He remains at risk of ill-treatment and is in need of urgent medical attention.

Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady, 36, was allowed a visit by his family in al-Ha'ir prison on 7 July, after almost 10 months of incommunicado detention, mainly in solitary confinement and on hunger strike in protest against his unfair trial and imprisonment. His family had appealed to the authorities for months to be able to see him.

According to family members, al-Bajady has lost a lot of weight and complains of pain in his stomach which he thinks is the result of being force-fed for over seven months. Despite his objections, he was fed intravenously, and was kept in solitary confinement as punishment for his hunger strike. He says he has not received adequate medical attention despite numerous requests to the prison authorities. On one occasion, he and a few other prisoners were reportedly taken out of their prison cells by masked security agents and forced to spend two days on bare floors blindfolded. When he returned to his cell, his personal belongings had disappeared.

Mohammed al-Bajady was arrested in the town of Burayda, north of the capital, Riyadh, on 21 March 2011. He was denied legal representation during his trial at Riyadh's Specialized Criminal Court from August 2011 to April 2012. He was convicted on charges relating to involvement in the establishment of an unlicensed organization, harming the image of the state through the media, calling on the families of political detainees to protest and hold sit-ins, contesting the independence of the judiciary and having banned books in his possession, and was sentenced to four years in prison, followed by a five-year travel ban. Activists believe, however, that the real reason he has been detained is his reporting of human rights violations in prisons and detention centres in Saudi Arabia and the help he has given to many families of detainees held without charge to bring cases against the Ministry of Interior.

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

- Calling on the authorities to quash the conviction of Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady and release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Urging them to provide him with immediate and regular access to a lawyer of his choice and any medical attention he may require;
- Urging them to end his solitary confinement and any other measures taken against him as punishment for his hunger strike.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 AUGUST 2013 TO:

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 11 403 3125 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Justice
His Excellency Shaykh Dr Mohammed
bin Abdulkareem Al-Issa
Ministry of Justice
University Street
Riyadh 11137
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: + 966 11 401 1741
+ 966 11 402 0311

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

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 11 403 3125 (please keep
trying)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

This is the third update of UA 91/11. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/010/2012/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities have recently unleashed a widespread campaign of persecution of human rights defenders, both through the courts and through arbitrary measures. The authorities have singled out activists who have used the judiciary to seek redress for violations by the Interior Ministry and security forces, or those who have criticized state institutions for shortcomings. Members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), set up in October 2009, have borne the brunt of the authorities' repression. ACPRA has reported on human rights violations and helped many families of detainees held without charge to bring cases against the Ministry of Interior before the Board of Grievances, an administrative court with jurisdiction to consider complaints against the state and its public services.

One of the co-founders of ACPRA, Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady had been arbitrarily detained and held incommunicado without charge at various times since 2007 for helping families of detainees. In the name of security and counter-terrorism, the authorities have detained numbers of people believed to be in the thousands over the past decade for years without charge or trial. Some were released within days, others were charged with vague security charges and tried secretly in special courts, and some have gone missing in what amounts to enforced disappearance. Al-Bajady also exposed violations inside Saudi Arabian prisons and detention centres: in December 2010, he documented and reported the torture and extrajudicial execution of a Yemeni man in the Tarafiyah detention centre in the city of Qasim.

Mohammed al-Bajady was arrested in Burayda, in the province of Qasim, on the afternoon of 21 March 2011, the day after he had taken part in a walk by families of detainees to the Ministry of Interior. He was taken to his house by uniformed agents and masked men in civilian clothes believed to be members of the Interior Ministry's General Investigation Department, who, according to local sources, confiscated books, documents and laptop computers. They then took him to his office where they confiscated more books, documents and computers; they filmed the inside of his house and office during these raids.

Throughout his detention, mainly at al-Ha'ir prison in Riyadh, al-Bajady's legal defence team were denied access to him and told that their right to represent him was not recognized by the court. They were not allowed to attend hearings, which began in August 2011, despite standing outside the court for hours. The hearing at which he was sentenced was attended by uniformed soldiers, as well as a representative of the governmental National Human Rights Commission. However, neither his family nor his legal representatives had been told the hearing would take place.

Although neither the charge sheet nor the sentence has been made public, leaked letters in his handwriting said that on 10 April 2012 the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh, set up to deal with terrorism and security-related cases, sentenced him to four years' imprisonment followed by a five-year travel ban.

Since he was sentenced, two of his three-member defence team – Dr Mohammad al-Qahtani and Dr Abdulkareem al-Khoder – have themselves been convicted of similar charges, and were sentenced to 11 and eight years in prison respectively, followed by travel bans, in March and June 2013. The other member of the team, Fowzan al-Harbi, is under investigation. Dr al-Qahtani's lawyer, Abdulaziz al-Hussan, was forced to leave the country after he was interrogated within hours of writing on Twitter about his client's detention conditions. Dr al-Khoder's lawyer, Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, is also under investigation for insulting a security officer on the day al-Khoder was sentenced. All are co-founders and active members of ACPRA.

Name: Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 91/11 Index: MDE 23/025/2013 Issue Date: 11 July 2013