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## **Saudi Arabia: Trial of Riyadh protester ‘utterly unwarranted’**

The trial before a state security court of a Saudi Arabian school teacher arrested nearly a year ago after he arrived to demonstrate on the “Day of Rage” in Riyadh is an affront to his basic rights, Amnesty International said today.

Khaled al-Johani stood trial today before the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh, a tribunal set up in 2008 to try detainees held on terrorism-related charges. The court adjourned his case until early April.

“Khaled al-Johani shouldn’t be standing trial in any court for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and assembly,” said Philip Luther, Interim Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme.

“The fact that he is appearing before a court that was originally established to handle terrorism-related charges only adds insult to injury.”

“This trial is utterly unwarranted. We call on the Saudi authorities to release him and others held on similar charges immediately and unconditionally.”

Khaled al-Johani is believed to have been the only protester who was able to reach the location of the planned “Day of Rage” demonstration on 11 March 2011 in Riyadh.

The 42-year-old was arrested by security forces and taken into detention within minutes of talking to BBC Arabic about the lack of freedoms in Saudi Arabia.

At his trial today the General Prosecutor read out the list of charges against him, which included his support of demonstrations, his presence at the location of a demonstration; and his communications with the foreign media in a manner that harmed the reputation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Since al-Johani’s arrest, he has not been represented by a lawyer, including in today’s trial session. However, the judge said al-Johani may appoint a lawyer of his own choice within a week.

Khaled al-Johani has five children whose ages range between six months - a baby born while he was in detention – and 12 years old.

Amnesty International considers al-Johani to be a prisoner of conscience, held for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and assembly.

The organization has learnt that another man is being tried at the same court on charges relating to the 11 March planned protest in Riyadh.