

URGENT ACTION

SHI'A CLERIC AT RISK OF TORTURE

Saudi Arabian Shi'a cleric Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr was arrested on 27 February following a sermon he gave calling for reforms in Saudi Arabia. He has been detained incommunicado since and is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Amnesty International is concerned that he may be held solely for the peaceful expression of his right to freedom of expression and may therefore be a prisoner of conscience.

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr is a Shi'a religious cleric in the province of al-Ahsa. During his sermon on 25 February in Umat al-Islam Mosque in al-Hafouf city in al-Ahsa province he called for the need for deep-rooted reform in Saudi Arabia, including for a constitutional monarchy, fair distribution of jobs, and an end to discrimination against religious minorities. On the evening of 27 February members of General Intelligence (al-Mabahith al-'Ammah) came to his house and asked him to accompany them. He appears to have been taken away shortly afterwards. His family waited all evening but did not hear from him. Around half past midnight a member of General Intelligence contacted a member of his family to say that he had been arrested and was being held at the Department of General Intelligence in Dammam. The relative asked if the family could visit him and was told no.

He had been arrested and briefly detained on two previous occasions. The first was around three years ago apparently in connection with an art exhibition he organized for 'Ashura, a Shi'a festival. He was detained for about three days. The second was about two years ago when he was arrested seemingly in connection with practising aspects of the Shi'a faith. He was detained for about 10 days. Sometime after his release he was brought before a court accused of incitement against the government. The trial was adjourned to allow the prosecution time to provide evidence to substantiate the claim. Nothing is known to have happened with the case since.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to ensure that Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to his family, lawyer and any medical attention he may require;
- Noting that if he is being held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and association, Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience and call for his immediate and unconditional release;
- Asking for details of any charges he faces to be made public and calling on the authorities to ensure that any legal proceedings against him conform to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 APRIL 2011 TO:

Second Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of the Interior
His Royal Highness Prince 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 1185 (please keep
trying)**
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

King
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

And copies to:

President, Human Rights Commission
Bandar Mohammed 'Abdullah al-Aiban
Human Rights Commission
P.O. Box 58889, King Fahad Road,
Building No. 373, Riyadh 11515
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Email: hrc@haq-ksa.org
Salutation: Dear Dr al-Aiban

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Critics of the Saudi Arabian government face gross human rights violations at the hands of security forces under the control of the Ministry of Interior. They are often held incommunicado without charge, sometimes in solitary confinement, prevented from consulting lawyers and denied access to the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Torture or other ill-treatment are frequently used to extract confessions from detainees, to punish them for refusing to "repent", or to force them to make undertakings not to criticize the government. Incommunicado detention in Saudi Arabia often lasts until a confession is obtained, which can take months and occasionally years.

Saudi Arabia is a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which prohibits the use of evidence extracted under torture or other ill-treatment. Article 15 states: "Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made."

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

In February 2009 members of the Committee for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue (CPVPV), also known as the Mutawa'een or religious police, took video footage of Shi'a women who were visiting the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Madina. This angered a wider group of Shi'a men and women visiting the tomb and led to them protesting outside the offices of the CPVPV in Madina to request the handover of the footage. The situation escalated into a series of clashes when members of the CPVPV attacked the protesters; a number of the protesters were injured and at least nine were arrested but released after about one week in detention. According to Minister of Interior Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud, some individuals from the Sunni community were arrested too.

The incident sparked demonstrations in the Eastern Province, following which at least 10 members of the Shi'a community, including six boys aged 14-16, were arrested and detained. Several of the boys were released after a few weeks; Amnesty International has not been able to ascertain what happened to the others.

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* [Muslim community]. 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."

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