

URGENT ACTION

PROTESTORS ARRESTED IN SAUDI ARABIA

Around 24 men were detained on 3 and 4 March following protests in the city of al-Qatif, Saudi Arabia. They are believed to be held incommunicado and are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Amnesty International is concerned that they may be held solely for the peaceful expression of their right to freedom of expression and may therefore be prisoners of conscience.

The men were arrested following protests in al-Qatif, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, against the continuing detention without trial of nine members of the Shi'a community in connection with an attack on the Khobar Towers housing complex in the city of al-Khobar, in which 19 US military personnel and one Saudi Arabian national were killed. Two of those detained, **Hussain al-Yusef** and **Hussein al-'Alq**, have also written articles on the Shi'a website www.rasid.com, which often details arrests of and discrimination against members of the Shi'a community. Hussain al-Yusef was arrested at the protest. Hussein al-'Alq was arrested at his house at around midnight the same day by members of the General Intelligence and taken to a police station in nearby Tarut. An hour later he was taken to a police station in al-Qatif and his family has not heard from him since.

Hussain al-'Alq has been arrested twice before. The first time was after the 1996 attack in al-Khobar, when he was detained in connection with the attack for seven months without charge or trial, and the second around a year later, when he was detained for five months without charge or trial. Around a year ago he was summoned to a police station and detained for a few hours after he wrote a critical article against a sheikh.

Around 200 people, including the wives of those detained in connection with the al-Khobar attack, were reported to have taken part in the protests in al-Qatif. The protests appear to have been peaceful but at least three people were said to have been beaten with batons and kicked by security forces policing it.

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

- Urging the authorities to ensure that the around 24 men detained following the protests in al-Qatif, including Hussain al-Yusef and Hussein al-'Alq, are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to their family, lawyers and any medical attention they may require;
- Noting that if they are being held solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and association, Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience and call for their immediate and unconditional release;
- Asking for details of any charges they face to be made public and calling on the authorities to ensure that any legal proceedings against them conform to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 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

Nine people from the Shi'a community in the Eastern Province were arrested over 14 years ago in connection with the 1996 attack in al-Khobar and continue to be held without trial. The nine were interrogated, allegedly tortured and denied access to lawyers together with the opportunity to challenge in court the legality of their detention or seek redress for abuses of their rights. They are reported to be held in al-Dammam Prison. They include Hani al-Sayegh, now in his 40s, who had sought asylum in the USA, but was forcibly returned to Saudi Arabia on 11 October 1999 and detained immediately on arrival. The other eight are: 'Abdullah Ahmad al-Jarrash, Hussain 'Abdullah Al Magis, 'Abdulkarim Hussain al-Nimr, al-Sayyid Mustafa al-Qassab, al-Sayyid Fadhil al-'Alawi, Mustafa Ja'far al- Muallam, 'Ali Ahmad al-Marhoun and Salih Mahdi Ramadan.

Although Amnesty International is not aware of any legal text banning demonstrations, in practice the Saudi Arabian authorities have generally not tolerated them taking place. Those who try to organize or participate in them are often arrested, held incommunicado without charge and denied access to the courts to challenge the legality of their detention. After a protest against the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip launched on 27 December 2008, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior was reported as making an explicit announcement on 30 December 2008 that protests in the Saudi Arabia were banned. Following the protests last week in al-Qatif and amid reports that protests calling for reform in Saudi Arabia will take place on 11 March, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement on 5 March confirming the ban on demonstrations in the Kingdom. According to the statement, security forces would take "all necessary measures" against those who attempt to disrupt order.

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 is 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.

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