

URGENT ACTION

PROTESTERS RELEASED IN SAUDI ARABIA

Around 24 men who were detained on 3 and 4 March following protests in the city of al-Qatif, Saudi Arabia, were released without charge on 8 March after they were made to sign pledges saying they would not protest again.

The men were arrested following protests in al-Qatif, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, against the continuing detention without trial of nine male members of the Shi'a community. The nine are detained in connection with an attack in 1996 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 the around 24 men detained for protesting, 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-'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.

All 24 men were released on 8 March without charge reportedly only after they signed a pledge not to protest again.

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.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the first update of UA 61/11. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/005/2011>

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