

URGENT ACTION

PROTESTERS DETAINED IN SAUDI ARABIA

Around 15 men are still detained in police stations in the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh, following a protest on 16 December. They may be prisoners of conscience, held for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

The group of **around 15 men** were among dozens of men and women who were arrested on 16 December at al-Rajhi mosque in Riyadh. They had gathered to protest about the detention of relatives who have been held without charge or trial in Saudi Arabia for several years, accused of security-related offences. Little else is known about these relatives, or the circumstances of their detention.

At around 1.30pm on 16 December, security forces arrested men who had begun gathering outside the mosque. Members of the religious police arrested several more women inside the women's section of the mosque for taking part in the sit-in. According to information received by Amnesty International, the men and women were taken to several police stations in Riyadh. Many were released on the same day or in the following days. By 21 December all the women were thought to have been released. However, at least 15 men continue to be detained.

The relatives of those detained had called for sit-in protests to take place simultaneously in five places: the capital, Riyadh, the city of Dammam in the Eastern Province, al-Jawf province in the north, Qasim province in central Saudi Arabia, and the city of Abha in the south of the country. They called for people to gather outside mosques or conduct sit-ins inside mosques after Friday prayers in the afternoon of 16 December. Other people are believed to have been arrested during protests which took place outside Riyadh, but it is thought they have all now been released.

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

- Expressing concern that around 15 men arrested after protests at al-Rajhi mosque in Riyadh on 16 December appear to be held solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly, in which case they would be prisoners of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that the men are protected from torture or other ill-treatment, given regular access to their family, lawyers of their own choosing and any adequate medical care they may require;
- Asking them to make public the details of any charges they may face, and ensure that any legal proceedings against them conform to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 FEBRUARY 2012 TO:

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 3125 (please keep trying)
Salutation: Your Majesty

Governor of Riyadh

His Royal Highness Sattam bin Abdul
Aziz Al Saud
Riyadh Principality
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Email: webmaster@riyadh.gov.sa
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

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
Fax: +966 1 46 12 061
Email: hrc@hag-ksa.org

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities have generally not tolerated dissent and protests have not been allowed. 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 lawfulness of their detention.

After a protest against the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip launched on 27 December 2008, reports from inside Saudi Arabia stated that a spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior made an explicit announcement on 30 December 2008 that protests were banned in Saudi Arabia. Following protests at the beginning of March 2011 in the city of al-Qatif (see UA 61/11, 7 March 2011, MDE23/005/2011) and amid reports that further protests calling for reform in Saudi Arabia were planned, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement on 5 March confirming the ban on demonstrations. According to the statement, security forces would take "all necessary measures" against those who attempt to disrupt order.

The following day, the Council of Senior Ulema (a body of religious scholars) also emphasized the prohibition of demonstrations in the country. They warned that demonstrations would stir discord and division in society, and stated that these were not the appropriate means for calling for reform or giving advice. On the same day, the Shura Council (a consultative body appointed by the King to advise on legislation and policy) stressed the importance of preserving the security of the Kingdom and ignoring misleading calls for the organization of demonstrations, sit-ins and marches, which, they argued, were incompatible with the principles of Islamic law.

Critics of the Saudi Arabian government face gross human rights violations. They are often held incommunicado without charge, sometimes in solitary confinement, denied access to lawyers or 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.

Amnesty International detailed the crackdown on freedom of expression and protests in the name of security in a recent report entitled *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security* (Index: MDE 23/016/2011), issued on 1 December 2011 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/saudi-arabia-protesters-and-reformists-targeted-name-security-2011-12-01>).

Name: At least 15 men

Gender m/f: Male

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