

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON HUNGER STRIKE

Two prominent Saudi Arabian human rights defenders have been on hunger strike since 3 March in protest at their deteriorating prison conditions. Their lives may be in danger because of poor prison conditions and ill-health. They are prisoners of conscience.

Dr Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali al-Hamid and **Dr Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih al-Qahtani**, co-founders of the human rights NGO Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), were sentenced on 9 March 2013 to 11 and 10 years' imprisonment respectively on charges related to their activism. The sentences were upheld by the Court of Appeal in January 2014. Both men are in al-Ha'ir prison in the capital, Riyadh, and may be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Dr Abdullah al-Hamid was moved on 3 March to a ward where the hygiene standards are poor and smoking is allowed at all times. He started a hunger strike in protest the same day. He had been admitted to hospital before, and it is feared that placing him in this ward will worsen his already fragile health.

Mohammad al-Qahtani was moved to solitary confinement after he started a hunger strike in protest at the continuous deterioration of his prison conditions. Since the beginning of his sentence, he has been moved between prison sections reserved for prisoners convicted of violent crimes, putting his life at risk. Before now the prison authorities have arbitrarily confiscated each man's books and personal belongings. On 5 March, legal representatives of the two men tried to visit them in al-Ha'ir prison, but the prison officials said this was not allowed.

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

- Urging the authorities to release Dr Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali al-Hamid and Dr Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih al-Qahtani immediately and unconditionally as they are prisoners of conscience detained solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Urging them to refrain from punishing the men for their hunger strikes and to ensure that both men receive any medical attention they may require, and are given immediate and regular access to their families and legal representatives;
- Calling on them to ensure that both men are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, in accordance with international human rights standards on the protection of persons subject to detention and imprisonment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 APRIL 2014 TO:

King and Prime Minister

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 11 403 3125 (please keep trying)
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of the Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed
bin Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
Ministry of the Interior, P.O. Box 2933,
Airport Road, Riyadh 11134
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 11 403 3125 (please keep
trying)
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Shaykh Dr Mohammed
bin Abdulkareem Al-Issa
Ministry of Justice
University Street
Riyadh 11137
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: + 966 11 401 1741
+ 966 11 402 0311

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

This is the second update of UA 257/12. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/010/2013/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and Dr Mohammad al-Qahtani were convicted of a list of offences, among them "breaking allegiance to and disobeying the ruler", "questioning the integrity of officials", "seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations", "disseminating false information to foreign groups", "violating Article 6 of the information technology law" and "forming an unlicensed organization" (understood to be ACPRA). The court also ordered the disbanding of ACPRA, confiscation of its property and the closure of its social media accounts. Both men appealed on 28 May 2013 and had their sentences upheld by the Court of Appeal in January 2014.

The men had been detained during an intensified campaign by the Saudi Arabian authorities to prosecute human rights defenders with total impunity. Members of ACPRA, have borne the brunt of the authorities' repression. ACPRA, set up in October 2009, has reported on human rights violations and helped many families of detainees held without charge to bring cases against the Ministry of Interior before the Board of Grievances, a court set up to consider complaints against the state.

Fowzan al-Harbi, another founding member of ACPRA, was arrested on 26 December 2013 at the end of his second hearing before the Criminal Court in Riyadh. The judge ordered his arrest without providing any reason, despite repeated requests from al-Harbi's lawyer. He has been on trial since 4 December on similar charges related to his activism (see further information on UA 15/14, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/002/2014/en>). All of ACPRA's members who have been detained so far have complained about their prison conditions.

Two other members of ACPRA, Dr Abdullah al-Hamid's brother Issa al-Hamid and Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, have been summoned several times for questioning about their peaceful activism, by the General Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution. Issa al-Hamid is being investigated for "stirring public opinion" and "founding and acting as president of an unlicensed organization". Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, another co-founder and current vice-president of ACPRA, has been under investigation since 11 May 2013, facing similar charges to his colleagues. It is feared that both men will soon be tried and imprisoned.

A number of other independent human rights groups and activists have also been harassed by the Saudi Arabian authorities. On 6 February 2014 Waleed Abu al-Khair, a prominent human rights defender and the head of Saudi Arabian Monitor for Human Rights, had his three-month prison sentence upheld by the Court of Appeal in Mecca for "ridiculing the Saudi Arabian judicial system". He is expected to begin serving his sentence soon while still facing charges related to his peaceful activism before the Specialised Criminal Court. Six prominent reformists, including Dr Suliaman al-Rashhudi and Dr Saud al-Hashimi, have been serving lengthy prison terms since late 2012 after they circulated a petition calling for political reform and discussed a proposal to establish an independent human rights organization (see UA 107/13, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/014/2013/en>).

Names: Dr Abdullah al-Hamid, Dr Mohammad al-Qahtani

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 257/12 Index: MDE 23/004/2014 Issue Date: 7 March 2014