

URGENT ACTION

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST DETAINED

Women's rights activist Souad al-Shammari was detained on 28 October following her first interrogation session. Amnesty International believes she is a prisoner of conscience.

Souad al-Shammari, a prominent Saudi Arabian women's rights activist, was detained on 28 October 2014 after a four-hour interrogation session at the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution in Jeddah. At the end of the interrogation the General Prosecutor informed her that she would be detained for further questioning. She was transferred to the women's section at the General Prison of Briman, in Jeddah, where she is currently held.

Amnesty International has learnt that Souad al-Shammari was questioned about her tweets from over a year ago which the Saudi Arabian authorities now seem to claim were inciting Saudi Arabian women to rebel against the guardianship system and were mocking religious texts and religious authorities. Souad al-Shammari, a mother of six, who used to work as a school headmaster in Jeddah, was forcibly retired from her post in 2011, reportedly because of her activism. She has since then been denied her pension and retirement benefits. In February 2013, a case was reportedly brought against her by religious clerics accusing her of insulting Islam. She has been banned from travelling since March 2013.

As a prominent women's rights activist, Souad al-Shammari is well-known for her opposition to the country's guardianship system which subordinates women's autonomy to the authority of male guardians. She has participated in campaigns to lift the ban on women to drive cars in Saudi Arabia. She is also the head of the Saudi Arabian Liberals Network, which is a network of activists peacefully calling for social and political reform. One of the founding members of the Saudi Arabian Liberals Network, Raif Badawi, was sentenced in September to, among others things, 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes for his online activism.

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

- Expressing concern that Souad al-Shammari has been detained solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression and association, and asking that she be released immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging the authorities, pending her release, to ensure that she is given regular access to her family and a lawyer of her choice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 DECEMBER 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 Justice

His Excellency Sheikh 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
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

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)

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

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

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The recent arrest of Souad al-Shammari is part of the widespread campaign launched by the Saudi Arabian authorities to persecute civil society activists and human rights defenders, using both the courts and extrajudicial means of harassment such as the imposition of travel bans.

Scores of Saudi Arabian human rights activists, including all active founding members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), founding members of the Adala Center for Human Rights and the Monitor for Human Rights have been imprisoned over the past months on similarly vaguely worded charges and after grossly unfair trials for exercising their basic rights to freedoms of expression, association and assembly (see MDE 23.025.2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/025/2014/en>).

Souad al-Shammari has herself faced persecution by the authorities since 2011, when she was forcibly retired from her post as a headmaster of a Jeddah-based school, reportedly because of her activism. She has since been denied her retirement benefits with no explanation. In February 2013 a case was reportedly brought against her by a number of religious clerics in Riyadh accusing her of insulting Islam by mocking religious texts and religious authorities and inciting women to liberate and rebel in a conservative society. As a result she was called for numerous interrogation sessions in Riyadh and she has been banned from travelling since March 2013. Upon her request the case was transferred in September 2014 from Riyadh to the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution in Jeddah, her place of residence. It is believed that her current detention might be linked to this earlier case in addition to a number of other posts and tweets she might have written on social media websites since then.

One of Souad al-Shammari's associates is the well-known Saudi Arabian blogger Raif Badawi who was sentenced earlier in 2014 to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes, followed by a 10-year travel ban, a ban on using media outlets, and a fine of one million Saudi Arabian riyals (about US\$266,600) for setting up the Saudi Arabian Liberals website and "insulting Islam". He is currently at imminent risk of receiving the first set of lashes at any time (see UA 3/13, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/023/2014/en>).

Also in 2014, Raif Badawi's lawyer, prominent human rights defender Waleed Abu al-Khair, was sentenced by the Specialized Criminal Court to 15 years in prison to be followed by a 15-year travel ban. He was found guilty of "disobeying the ruler and seeking to remove his legitimacy", "insulting the judiciary and questioning the integrity of judges", "setting up an unlicensed organization", "harming the reputation of the state by communicating with international organizations" and "preparing, storing and sending information that harms public order" (see UA 98/14, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/016/2014/en>).

Saudi Arabia's guardianship system requires women to obtain the permission of a male guardian in order to marry, travel to most countries, undergo certain types of surgery, undertake paid employment or enroll in higher education.

Name: Souad al-Shammari

Gender m/f: f

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