

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 23/002/2002

UA 54/02 Incommunicado detention/fear of torture/ 19 February 2002
possible prisoners of conscience

SAUDI ARABIA Shaikh Ahmad Turki al-Sa'ab (m)
Hamad 'Ali Daseeny al-Hutailah (m)
Hamad Qulayan al-Zbeydi (m)

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the three members of the minority Shi'a Muslim community named above. They are being held in incommunicado detention, where they are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Shaikh Ahmad Turki al-Sa'ab, who is said to be a leading member of the Ismaili branch of the Shi'a Muslim community in Saudi Arabia, was reportedly arrested in Najran, in the south west of the country on 15 January. A few weeks later, around 4 February, two other people from the same community, Hamad 'Ali Daseeny al-Hutailah and Hamad Qulayan al-Zbeydi, were reportedly arrested, also in Najran.

The arrest of all three men is believed to be connected with an interview that Shaikh Ahmad Turki al-Sa'ab gave to a foreign journalist in which he reportedly expressed some criticism of the Saudi Arabian authorities' policy towards the Ismaili community in the country. Hamad 'Ali Daseeny al-Hutailah reportedly acted as an interpreter during the interview. The reasons for Hamad Qulayan al-Zbeydi's arrest are unknown, but he is believed to have also been present during the interview.

If the three men are being held because Shaikh Ahmad Turki al-Sa'ab expressed his political beliefs and did not advocate violence, Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience who should be released immediately.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hundreds of people were arrested in April 2000 following protests by members of the Ismaili religious community in Najran. The protests took place following the closure of their mosque by Saudi Arabian security forces. At least two people were reportedly killed and many others were injured. Those killed may have been victims of extrajudicial execution or excessive use of force, and those detained may be prisoners of conscience, held solely for the non-violent expression of their conscientiously held beliefs. Amnesty International sought clarification of the circumstances surrounding the killings and the arrests, but has never received a response. It is reported that over 100 people arrested during the protests continue to be held, 17 of them are said to have sentenced to death (see EXTRA 06/02, AI Index: MDE 23/001/2002, 17 January 2002).

Individuals suspected of political or religious dissent often risk arbitrary arrest and indefinite detention without charge or trial. Such detainees are regularly subjected to torture or ill-treatment. In the rare instances when they are charged and brought to trial, the proceedings invariably fail to meet the most elementary standards of fairness.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic or your own language:

- seeking clarification of the exact reasons for the arrest of Shaikh Ahmad Turki al-Sa'ab, Hamad 'Ali Daseeny al-Hutailah and Hamad Qulayan al-Zbeydi;
- seeking assurances that they are being treated humanely and have access to lawyers, relatives and medical care as necessary;
- urging that they be immediately released if they are being held solely for the non-violent expression of their conscientiously held beliefs.

APPEALS TO:

King and Prime Minister, The Custodian of the Two Holy Shrines

His Majesty King Fahd bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud

Office of H.M. The King, Royal Court, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegrams: King Fahd, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Salutation: Your Majesty.

Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard

His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud

Royal Court, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegrams: H.R.H Prince Abdullah, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Minister of the Interior,

His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz

Minister of the Interior, Ministry of the Interior

P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road, Riyadh 11134, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegrams: Minister of Interior, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 403 1185

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Dr. 'Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh

Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice, University Street, Riyadh 11137,
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegrams: Minister of Justice, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 401 1741

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 April 2002.