

URGENT ACTION

NGO FOUNDERS JAILED FOR ACTIVISM, DISSENT

Two of the co-founders of a Saudi Arabian human rights organization have been imprisoned on charges related to their human rights activism and criticism of the Saudi Arabian authorities. Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience.

Dr Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali al-Hamid and **Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih al-Qahtani**, both co-founders of the human rights NGO Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), were sentenced on 9 March to five and 10 years' imprisonment respectively. They have begun their sentences in al-Malaz prison, in the capital, Riyadh. Dr Abdullah al-Hamid is to serve a total of 11 years, as the court reinstated part of a seven-year sentence that had been handed down in 2005 for an offence for which he had later been pardoned by the King. Both men were also sentenced to travel bans equal to their prison terms, to begin on their release. The court also ordered the disbanding of ACPRA, confiscation of its property and the closure of its social media accounts.

The Criminal Court in Riyadh found Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and Mohammed al-Qahtani guilty 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.

Dr Abdullah al-Hamid had been sentenced in May 2005 to seven years' imprisonment on charges that included "sowing dissent and disobeying the ruler"; he and others had been arrested in 2004 for calling for political reform. They were released under a royal pardon on 8 August 2005 by the then new King Abdullah. Dr Abdullah al-Hamid is a well-known advocate of reform and has been detained several times. He began a four-month prison sentence for "incitement to protest" on 8 March 2008. He went on trial on the latest charges on 11 June 2012. Mohammad al-Qahtani was one of several human rights activists present as observers at that hearing, and he was only then informed that he was to be brought to trial a week later. His trial began on 18 June 2012, and there have been 11 hearings so far.

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

- Calling on the authorities to release Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and Mohammad al-Qahtani immediately and unconditionally as they are prisoners of conscience held solely for the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Asking them to ensure that Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and Mohammad al-Qahtani are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given immediate and regular access to their families and lawyers.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 APRIL 2013 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 1 403 3125 (please keep trying)
Salutation: Your Majesty

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 1 401 1741/ + 966 1 402
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 1 403 3125 (please keep
trying)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 257/12. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/018/2012/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities have recently targeted a number of human rights defenders, both through the courts and through arbitrary measures such as the imposition of travel bans.

Among the latest to be targeted are Dr Suliaman al-Rashudi and eight other men who were detained in February 2007 in the cities of Jeddah and Medina after they circulated a petition calling for political reform and discussed a proposal to establish an independent human rights organization in Saudi Arabia. Seven other men connected to one of the reformists, Dr Saud al-Hashimi, were arrested subsequently. All 16 were held without charge until August 2010 when they were formally charged. Dr al-Rashudi was released on bail on 23 June 2011 after two people provided personal guarantees. On 22 November 2011, the 16 men were sentenced to lengthy prison terms followed by travel bans by the Specialized Criminal Court. Dr al-Rashudi was rearrested on 12 December 2012, two days after he had given a lecture at an informal social gathering on the legality of holding demonstrations in Shari'a. He had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and a 15-year travel ban, but was at liberty pending appeal. In January 2013, the 16 men were offered a royal "pardon" if they signed a pledge not to repeat their offences or engage in public activism, and thanked the King. Dr al-Rashudi and six others refused to sign such a pledge and so are still detained. Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience.

Members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), which was set up in October 2009, have also been extensively targeted by the Saudi Arabian authorities. ACPRA 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, an administrative court with jurisdiction to consider complaints against the state and its public services.

On 10 April 2012 the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh, which was set up to deal with terrorism and security-related cases, sentenced Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady, a co-founder of ACPRA, to four years' imprisonment followed by a five-year travel ban. He was reportedly convicted of charges relating to involvement in the establishment of an unlicensed organization, harming the image of the state through the media, calling on the families of political detainees to protest and hold sit-ins, contesting the independence of the judiciary and having banned books in his possession. See FU UA 91/11, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/010/2012>

Other activists under threat include 57-year-old human rights defender and writer Mikhlif bin Daham al-Shammari, who faces a number of charges, including trying to harm the reputation of the Kingdom in international media, communicating with suspect organizations and accusing state organs of corruption. Another human rights activist, 33-year-old Waleed Abu al-Khair, is still fighting charges of disrespecting the judiciary and harming the reputation of the Kingdom by giving an international organization false information. His trial before the Criminal Court in Jeddah began in September 2011. He also had a travel ban imposed on him in March 2012, just days before he planned to attend a democracy course at a US university.

Amnesty International detailed the crackdown on freedom of expression and protests in the name of security in *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security*, (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/016/2011/en>). See also this press release on the crackdown on activists, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/saudi-arabia-ramps-clampdown-human-rights-activists-2012-06-18>

Names: Dr Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali al-Hamid, Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih al-Qahtani
Gender m/f: m

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