

24 August 2000

UA 253/00

Fear of Torture/Possible Prisoner of ConscienceSAUDI ARABIA Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim

Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim was arrested on 11 August 2000 at the al-Haditha check point on the border between Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The exact reason for his arrest is not known, but may be related to his Shi'a religious beliefs or activities. Amnesty International fears that Sheikh al-Ghanim may be at risk of torture.

At the time of his arrest, the 39-year-old Saudi Arabian father of five was returning to Saudi Arabia after a holiday in Syria. Prior to his arrest, he was reportedly summoned to the headquarters of the *al-Mabahith al-'Ammah* (General Investigations), who are accountable to the Minister of the Interior, and asked to write a detailed report, particularly about the countries he has visited and suspected political opponents he may have known.

Two days later his house was searched. He is currently held in the *al-Mabahith al-'Ammah* prison in the town of Dammam and has not been allowed any visits since his arrest. He is said to suffer from back problems.

Sheikh al-Ghanim returned to Saudi Arabia from exile in 1993 following the agreement reached between Shi'a groups and the government, which granted amnesty to Shi'a prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, and allowed many Shi'a political opponents living abroad to return home.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Widespread arbitrary arrest and detention of Shi'a Muslims or political opponents continues in Saudi Arabia. Fear of prosecution prevents members of the Shi'a religion from practising their faith freely.

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 telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in or your own language:

- seeking assurances that Sheikh al-Ghanim is treated humanely, protected from torture and given access to family, lawyers and medical attention;
- requesting information regarding his arrest, including the reason for this and whether he has been charged with a criminal offence;
- expressing concern that he may have been arrested solely for the peaceful expression of his religious or political beliefs, and, in that case, calling for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience.

APPEALS TO: (please note that Saudi fax numbers can be very unreliable)

King and Prime MinisterThe 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

Telegram: King Fahd, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Salutation: Your Majesty

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

Telegram: Minister of Interior, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 403 1185

Telex: 404416

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Royal Highness Prince Saud al-Faisal bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud,
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Nasseriya Street,

Riyadh 11124, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegram: Foreign Affairs Minister, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 403 0159

Telex: 405000

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

Telegram: Minister of Justice, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 401 1741

Telex: 405 980 MINJUS SJ

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 5 October.