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## **Saudi Arabia detains women protesters**

Two women remain in detention after being arrested in Riyadh on Sunday during a protest to demand fair trials for their relatives, sources told Amnesty International.

Some 15 women and five children were arrested yesterday outside the Ministry of Interior. They had been calling for fair trials for their male relatives, who are being detained without charge – in some cases for up to 10 years.

All but two women were released after they were believed to have signed pledges not to protest again.

“If these women were arrested solely for peacefully demonstrating in public, we would consider them to be prisoners of conscience and call for their immediate and unconditional release,” said Philip Luther, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme.

“The Saudi Arabian authorities must ensure they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment while in detention, and they must be given regular access to family and lawyers, as well as any medical treatment they may need.”

The two remaining women are Rima bint Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh, a member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), and Sharifa al-Saqa’abi. Both had previously signed petitions calling for reform in the country.

Rima bint Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh was believed to have refused to sign the pledge or to have her mahram (male guardian) act as her guarantor to secure her release. Rima bint Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh was previously held for her participation in a similar protest in July 2007 and released three days later.

Mohammed Salih al-Bajadi, a co-founder of ACPRA, was among scores who were arrested following another protest to demand the release of political prisoners on 20 March 2011. He has continued to be detained since.

Since 11 September 2001, Saudi Arabian authorities have arbitrarily detained thousands of people, including peaceful critics of the government and human rights activists. Many continue to be held without charge or trial.

Amnesty International research has shown that those critical of the Saudi Arabian government face gross human rights violations at the hands of the security forces. These include being held incommunicado without charge, being denied access to lawyers or the courts to challenge the legality of their detention, and being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment to extract confessions or force them to “repent”.

“As a state party to the Convention against Torture, Saudi Arabia must end its brutal treatment of those detained for daring to speak out,” said Philip Luther.

“Charges against all detainees must be made public and they must be given fair trials that meet international standards.”