

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST ON HUNGER STRIKE

Human rights activist Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady, who is on trial, is reported to be on hunger strike. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience detained solely for his human rights activism.

Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady, a 36-year-old businessman who co-founded the human rights NGO Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) in October 2009, which is not officially registered, was arrested the day after he went to a protest outside the Interior Ministry in Riyadh on 20 March 2011.

He was arrested in the town of Buraydah, in the province of Qasim, north of the capital, Riyadh, in the afternoon of 21 March. He was then taken to his house by uniformed agents and men in civilian clothes believed to have been members of the interior ministry's internal security service, the General Investigation, who, according to sources, confiscated books, documents and laptops. They then went with him to his office where they confiscated more books, documents and computers. They filmed the search at home and the inside of his office.

Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady has been on trial since August 2011 at Riyadh's Specialized Criminal Court, set up to deal with terrorism and security-related cases. He has been charged with being a member of ACPRA, harming the reputation of the state and having banned books in his possession. His legal defence team have not been allowed to visit him since his arrest or attend his trial. They have been told that their right to represent him is not recognized by the court, and were not let in to hearings despite standing outside the court for hours.

There have been reports that he has been on hunger strike since 11 March in protest against his arbitrary arrest and unfair trial and that he has refused family visits, which he has only been allowed since 8 October 2011., Reports from within Saudi Arabia have also indicated that he has refused to take water since 7 April and as a result he has passed out several times. An interior ministry spokesman told news agencies on 10 April that Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady is not on hunger strike and that he is in good health. His legal defence team have asked to be allowed to visit him to check for themselves. He is held in Riyadh's al-Ha'ir prison.

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

- Calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to drop all charges against Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady and release him immediately and unconditionally as he is being held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Urging them to provide him with immediate and regular access to a lawyer of his choice and any medical attention he may require until such time as he is released.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 MAY 2012 TO:

King of Saudi Arabia
His Majesty 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

Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior
His Royal Highness Prince 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)
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

And copies to:
Minister of Justice
His Excellency Shaikh Dr Mohammed bin Abdul kareem Al-Issa
Ministry of Justice
University Street
Riyadh 11137
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: + 966 1 401 1741

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 91/11. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/009/2011>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady
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The Saudi Arabian authorities have generally not tolerated protests taking place. Those who try to organize protests or take part in them are often arrested, held incommunicado without charge and denied access to the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Likewise critics of the government are often held incommunicado without charge, sometimes in solitary confinement, denied access to lawyers or the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Torture or other ill-treatment are frequently used to extract “confessions” from detainees, to punish them for refusing to “repent”, or to force them to make undertakings not to criticize the government. Incommunicado detention often lasts until a “confession” is obtained, which can take months and occasionally years.

Following the protests in February 2011 onwards by the minority Shi’a Muslim community in the Eastern Province (see UA 61/11, 7 March 2011, MDE23/005/2011) and amid reports that further protests calling for reform by others in Saudi Arabia were planned, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement on 5 March 2011 confirming the ban on demonstrations. According to the statement, security forces would take “all necessary measures” against those who attempt to disrupt order.

Sporadic protests have continued, spurred in some cases by grievances about the prolonged detention without charge of relatives or about discrimination against the Shi’a minority, particularly in the east of the country, and in others by a desire for political reform. In most cases, they have been repressed quickly and those arrested have often been pressured into pledging not to come out onto the streets again, before being released or held incommunicado for prolonged periods. In some cases they are alleged to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated. The repression of protesters comes against a backdrop of continuing repression of human rights activists, political dissidents and critics of the authorities, a number of whom have been detained and, in some cases, tried and imprisoned. While they are often accused, and convicted, of security-related offences, in courts set up to deal with security and terrorism-related offences, the acts which they are alleged to have committed generally appear to involve merely the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady attended one of these protests on 20 March 2011, the day before his arrest, outside the offices of the Ministry of Interior in Riyadh. He had tweeted messages on Twitter about the protest beforehand. The protest, which was said to have lasted for a few hours, was reported to have been attended by scores of people. They were calling for the release of their male relatives, who have been detained for years without charge. A number of those at the protest were arrested, including some of the women. The women were said to have been released after they were made to fingerprint statements confirming that they had attended the protest. The men who were arrested at the protest are believed to be still detained. Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady has been arrested twice in recent years. In 2007 he was arrested and detained, apparently in connection with his human rights activities.

Amnesty International detailed the crackdown on freedom of expression and protests in the name of security in a recent report entitled *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security* (Index: MDE 23/016/2011), issued on 1 December 2011 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/saudi-arabia-protesters-and-reformists-targeted-name-security-2011-12-01>).

Name: Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady (previously referred to as Mohammad Salih al-Bajadi)
Gender m/f: M

Further information on UA: 91/11 Index: MDE 23/009/2012 Issue Date: 13 April 2012