



EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 493/90      Detention and Fear of Torture  
                 of Prisoner of Conscience

6 December 1990

SAUDI ARABIA

Salih al-'Azzaz

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Salih al-'Azzaz, a prominent writer and journalist, was arrested on 6 November 1990 in King 'Abdul-'Aziz Avenue in Riyadh reportedly while taking photographs of a women's demonstration, which took place that day in protest against the country's traditional prohibition for women to drive. Tens of Saudi women drove cars in convoy along King 'Abdul-'Aziz Avenue. Following the women's demonstration the Ministry of Interior introduced a legal ban on female drivers. Before the demonstration this ban had existed in practice but not in law.

Salih al-'Azzaz was reportedly arrested on suspicion of being one of the organizers of the demonstration. Forty-nine women were also detained for some hours in connection with the demonstration, but were released later the same day. Among them was Salih al-'Azzaz's wife, Fawzia al-Bakr, who is a professor at the Sociology Department of the University of Riyadh.

Salih al-'Azzaz is currently believed to be held in the Mabahith al-'Ammah (General Intelligence) Headquarters in the 'Ulaisha district of Riyadh. He is reportedly held incommunicado and there are serious fears that he may be tortured. Amnesty International has received consistent reports over the years suggesting that political detainees are often tortured or ill-treated in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the initial period of their detention when they are usually held incommunicado and in solitary confinement.

Salih al-'Azzaz was previously arrested in May 1982 and held without charge or trial until the end of the year when he was released following an amnesty. He was then editor-in-chief of al-Yawm (Today) newspaper, published at that time in al-Dammam. His wife, Fawzia al-Bakr, was also detained during the same period, apparently on political grounds. Salih al-'Azzaz is about 37 years old and has three children. At the time of his latest arrest he was editor-in-chief of the magazine of the Saudi Arabian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, published in Riyadh.

Amnesty International believes that Salih al-'Azzaz is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his apparent role in organizing a peaceful demonstration. It is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/airmail letters:**

- urging the immediate and unconditional release of Salih al-'Azzaz;
- expressing concern that he is being held in incommunicado detention and urging that he be given immediate access to a lawyer and family members;
- seeking assurances that he is being treated humanely and is given medical attention, including access to an independent doctor, where necessary.

**APPEALS TO**

The Custodian of the Two Holy Shrines  
King Fahd bin 'Abd al-'Aziz  
Head of State, Custodian of the Two Holy Shrines and  
Prime Minister  
Office of His Majesty the King  
Riyadh  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegrams: HM King Fahd bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, Riyadh, Saudi  
Arabia  
Telexes: 601193 CABNET SJ

His Royal Highness  
Crown Prince 'Abdullah bin 'Abd al-'Aziz  
First Deputy Prime Minister  
Office of H.R.H. The Crown Prince and  
First Deputy Prime Minister  
Riyadh  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegrams: HRH 'Abdullah bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, Riyadh, Saudi  
Arabia  
Telexes: 601357 CRPR SJ or 601590 CPROF SJ

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia in your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 January 1991.