

# **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT**

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## **Saudi Arabia: Release detained ACPRA activists**

The Saudi Arabian authorities must release all members of the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights (ACPRA) who are detained for criticizing the government's human rights record or calling for political reform, Amnesty International said today in the wake of last week's prison sentence against its youngest member.

Omar al-Hamid al-Sa'id, aged 22, was sentenced on 12 December by a criminal court in Burayda, in the central province of al-Qassim, to four years in prison and 300 lashes. He was also handed a four-year travel ban to be enforced after he has served his sentence.

Omar al-Sa'id was convicted of charges including disobeying the ruler, membership of an unlicensed organization, inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations and harming the image of the state by disseminating false information.

Amnesty International considers Omar al-Hamid al-Sa'id to be a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for his peaceful activities as a member of ACPRA and calls on the Saudi Arabian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release him and to ensure that he is not subjected to flogging or any other corporal punishment.

His trial was marred by procedural irregularities. Following his arrest on 28 April 2013, Omar al-Sa'id was denied legal assistance while being held for questioning by the General Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution and his lawyers were prevented from visiting him in prison after he was remanded into custody.

Regarding the final session of his trial on 12 December, his lawyers were not notified of the date despite their repeated requests to the judge for information about its timing the week before and were therefore unable to attend. Omar al-Sa'id himself only knew about the session when prison guards came to take him to court and was consequently unable to alert family or friends about it. He protested in court that the hearing was being held in secret, but the judge responded that the court session was open to the public, claiming that five individuals he said were journalists were present in the courtroom.

The trial is one of a series of trials against ACPRA members, all of which fall into a pattern of repression of the rights to freedom of association and expression in Saudi Arabia.

Since 28 November 2013, two other members of ACPRA, Issa al-Hamid and Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, have, on several occasions, been summoned by the General Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution for questioning about their peaceful activities for ACPRA. Issa al-Hamid is being investigated for "stirring public opinion" and founding and acting as president of an unlicensed organization. Abdulaziz al-Shubaily

is being investigated for “stirring public opinion” and membership of an unlicensed organization. It is likely that both men will be referred for trial by the end of the year.

Another co-founder of ACPRA, Fowzan al-Harbi, had his first trial session before a criminal court in the capital, Riyadh, on 4 December 2013. Charges against him include participation in inciting disobedience to the ruler, calling for public disorder, and co-founding an unlicensed organization and ignoring judicial decisions ordering its dissolution. The next hearing is scheduled for 26 December 2013. Fowzan al-Harbi is currently at liberty.

In March and June 2013, three founding members of ACPRA – Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali al-Hamid (brother of Issa al-Hamid), Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih al-Qahtani and Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder – were sentenced to between eight and 11 years in prison.

Amnesty international has repeatedly called on the Saudi Arabian authorities to uphold the rights to freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly and for the immediate and unconditional release of all those detained solely for the peaceful exercise of these rights.

During the review of Saudi Arabia’s human rights record before the UN Human Rights Council in October 2013, within the framework of the Council’s Universal Periodic Review mechanism, a number of participating states called on the Saudi Arabian authorities to allow NGOs active in the area of human rights to operate without fear of prosecution or other forms of harassment.

The Saudi Arabian authorities must stop sentencing human rights activists to imprisonment and subjecting them to other acts of judicial harassment because of their criticism of government policies or officials. Only by doing so can they begin to adequately address the country’s human rights record.

For further information on the cases mentioned above, see *Saudi Arabia: Human rights activists face court as crackdown intensifies* (Index: PRE01/627/2013), issued on 28 November (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/saudi-arabia-human-rights-activists-face-court-crackdown-intensifies-2013-1>).