

URGENT ACTION

TWO SAUDI ARABIAN WOMEN PROTESTERS DETAINED

Two women remain detained following their arrests at a protest on 3 July outside the Ministry of Interior's office in the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh. They may be held solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and may therefore be prisoners of conscience.

Rima bint Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh and **Sharifa al-Saqa'abi** are being held in al-Qassim prison in the town of Buraidah, north of the capital Riyadh but it is not known whether they have been given access to their lawyers or their families. If they are being held incommunicado they would be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. They were among a larger group of protesters containing around 25 women, 15 men and 6 children, calling for the fair and public trial of their male relatives, who have been detained for years without charge or trial. The protest, which was said to have begun at 4pm on 3 July, lasted for around an hour and a half until Ministry officials convinced the protesters that their messages had been heard and told them to leave. Rima bint Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh and Sharifa al-Saqa'abi were arrested by security forces as they were leaving, as were around 13 other women and five children, who were reportedly later released after they signed pledges not to protest again.

Both women had previously signed petitions calling for reform in the country. Rima bint Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh is believed to have refused to sign a pledge not to protest again or to have her *mahram* (male guardian) act as her guarantor to secure her release. She is a member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and was previously arrested on 19 July 2007 for taking part in a similar protest the day before and was released three days later.

Critics of the Saudi Arabian government face gross human rights violations at the hands of security forces under the control of the Ministry of Interior. They are often held incommunicado without charge, sometimes in solitary confinement, prevented from consulting lawyers and denied access to the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Torture or other ill-treatment is 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.

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

- Urge the authorities to ensure that Rima bint Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh and Sharifa al-Saqa'abi, who were arrested following a protest in Riyadh on 3 July, are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to family, lawyers and any medical attention they may require;
- Call for their immediate and unconditional release if they are being held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression or association and are therefore prisoners of conscience;
- Ask for details of any charges they face to be made public and calling on the authorities to ensure that any legal proceedings against them conform to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 AUGUST 2011 TO:

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

King

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

And copies to:

President, Human Rights Commission

Bandar Mohammed 'Abdullah al-Aiban

Human Rights Commission

P.O. Box 58889, King Fahad Road, Building

No. 373, Riyadh 11515

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Email: hrc@haq-ksa.org

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities have generally not tolerated protests taking place. Those who try to organize or participate in them are often arrested, held incommunicado without charge and denied access to the courts to challenge the legality of their detention.

After a protest against the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip launched on 27 December 2008, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior was reported as making an explicit announcement on 30 December 2008 that protests were banned in Saudi Arabia. Following the protests at the beginning of March 2011 in al-Qatif (see UA 61/11, 7 March 2011, MDE23/005/2011) and amid reports that further protests calling for reform in Saudi Arabia were planned, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement on 5 March confirming the ban on demonstrations. According to the statement, security forces would take "all necessary measures" against those who attempt to disrupt order.

Critics of the Saudi Arabian government face gross human rights violations at the hands of security forces under the control of the Ministry of Interior. They are often held incommunicado without charge, sometimes in solitary confinement, prevented from consulting lawyers and denied access to the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Torture or other ill-treatment is 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 in Saudi Arabia often lasts until a confession is obtained, which can take months and occasionally years.

Saudi Arabia is a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which prohibits the use of evidence extracted under torture or other ill-treatment. Article 15 states: "Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made."

Thousands of people have been arrested arbitrarily in Saudi Arabia since 11 September 2001, including peaceful critics of the state and human rights activists. For example, at least seven men were arrested in February 2007 in the cities of Jeddah and Madinah after they circulated a petition calling for political reform and discussed a proposal to establish an independent human rights organization in Saudi Arabia. Among those still detained include Dr Saud al-Hashimi, Al-Sharif Saif al-Ghalib, Dr Musa al-Qirni, Dr 'Abdel Rahman al-Shumayri, Fahd al-Qirshi, and 'Abdel Rahman Khan. They had also challenged the impunity enjoyed by Ministry of Interior officials who carry out arrests and detentions. The Ministry of Interior claimed in a statement that they were arrested because they were collecting money to support terrorism; the detainees deny this. Relatives of the seven men were among those protesting on 20 March 2011.

Mohammad Salih al-Bajadi, one of the founders of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), who had attended protest on the 20 March calling for the trial or release of all those detained without charge or trial, was arrested at his home the day after and has been detained since (see *Human Rights Activist detained after protest*, 25 March 2011, UA 91/11, Index: MDE 23/009/2011).

For more information, please see Amnesty International's report *Saudi Arabia: Assaulting human rights in the name of counter-terrorism*, issued on 22 July 2009 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/saudi-arabia-human-rights-abuses-name-fighting-terrorism-20090722>), and the update to the report *Saudi Arabia: Countering terrorism with repression*, issued on 11 September 2009 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/025/2009/en>).

Name: **Rima bint Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh (f)** and **Sharifa al-Saqa'abi (f)**

Further information on UA: 208/11 Index: MDE 23/014/2011 Issue Date: 5 July 2011

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