



24 November 2022

The undersigned civil society organisations are writing to the Saudi Arabian authorities to express their grave concern for the wellbeing of detained human rights defender Dr. Mohammed al-Qahtani, who has been subjected to enforced disappearance since 24 October 2022. We urge you to disclose his whereabouts and to release him immediately and unconditionally.

Dr. Mohammed al-Qahtani, a prominent human rights defender and academic arbitrarily detained since 2013, has been denied any family contact since 24 October 2022. The Saudi Arabian authorities have refused to provide any information about Dr. al-Qahtani since 24 October 2022, thus subjecting him to enforced disappearance. He will have served his full sentence on 22 November 2022.

On 30 October, Dr. al-Qahtani's wife called the prison to inquire about his whereabouts and was told by the prison guard that he had been transferred to another prison. The prison officer refused to disclose Dr. al-Qahtani's location.

His family suspects that the authorities are not allowing him to contact them as a punishment for filing a complaint about the repeated assaults he faced in al-Ha'ir prison by prisoners suffering from mental health issues, whom the authorities have placed in the same wing as al-Qahtani and other prisoners of conscience. Similar situations have led to wholly avoidable deaths, including that of Musa al-Qarni, who was horrifically murdered by an inmate at Dhahban Prison in October 2021. In May 2022, Dr. al-Qahtani was beaten by another inmate in his wing, and in mid-2021 one of the prisoners on the wing attempted to start a fire.

Dr. al-Qahtani, the co-founder of the now disbanded Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and a professor at the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, was serving a 10-year prison sentence on charges relating to his peaceful human rights work, including "breaking allegiance to the ruler" and "questioning the integrity of officials". We recall that on 4 September 2015, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found Dr. al-Qahtani's detention to be arbitrary and called for his release.

In a worrying new trend, authorities have continued to detain some prisoners of conscience beyond the expiration of their sentences, or have actually retried and increased the sentences of some already serving prison terms.

We urge the Saudi Arabian authorities to promptly disclose the whereabouts of Dr. Mohammed al-Qahtani and to release him immediately and unconditionally. Pending his release, the authorities must ensure he is allowed to contact his family without any delay.

Sincerely,

ACAT-France

ALQST for Human Rights

Amnesty International

Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)

European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR)

FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)

Human Rights First

Human Rights Foundation

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

MENA Rights Group

Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

Right Livelihood

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders