URGENT ACTION

RELEASE AID WORKER SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS

On 5 April, Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, a 37-year old Red Crescent worker, was sentenced by the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh to 20 years in prison to be followed by a 20-year travel ban on charges relating to the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, and following a trial marred by violations, including possible torture used to extract a "confession". The Saudi authorities must grant Abdulrahman al-Sadhan's immediate and unconditional release.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

His Majesty King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
Office of His Majesty the King
Royal Court, Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 11 403 3125 (please keep trying)
Twitter: @KingSalman

Your Majesty King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud,

On 12 March 2018, state security forces arrested Saudi national ***Abdulrahman al-Sadhan*** *from his place of work at the Saudi Arabian Red Crescent Society in Riyadh, the Saudi capital. They failed to present a warrant, confiscated his phone, and took him to an unknown location. After almost two years of no contact whatsoever, Abdulrahman al-Sadhan was finally allowed to call his family for the first time on 12 February 2020, wherein he mentioned being detained at al-Ha'ir prison, located approximately 25 miles south of Riyadh.*

On 3 March, Abdulrahman al-Sadhan attended his first secret hearing at the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC), without legal representation and in the absence of his father, who had been assisting his legal defence. He was charged on the basis of a series of satirical tweets from an account the prosecution accused him of running, and a so-called "confession" extracted under duress. After a series of hearings, the SCC sentenced Abdulrahman al-Sadhan on 5 April to 20 years in prison, to be followed by a 20-year travel ban. The verdict was announced in a closed session, without the presence of his lawyer or father. Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan plans to appeal the verdict.

I urge you to release Abdulrahman al-Sadhan immediately and unconditionally as he was sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence on charges related solely to the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. Furthermore, I call on you to order an independent and effective investigation into Abdulrahman al-Sadhan's two-year enforced disappearance and his claims before the court that he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated, and to provide a remedy for Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, including by holding those suspected of responsibility accountable in fair trials.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, born on 28 May 1983, is a Saudi national. He holds a university degree in business and works as an assistant to the Head of the Saudi Arabian Red Crescent Society in Riyadh. He is currently held in Al Ha'ir Prison in Riyadh where he is serving a 20-year prison sentence issued by the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh on 5 April 2021.

In his first session on 3 March 2020, Abdulrahman al-Sadhan faced trumped up charges under the anti-cybercrime and counter-terror laws based on his satirical tweets which include clauses on: preparing, storing and sending materials prejudicial to the public order and religious values.

On 11 March, a second hearing took place and was attended by Abdulrahman al-Sadhan's father and a court-appointed lawyer who was only permitted a 40-minute meeting with Abdulrahman al-Sadhan before the hearing. For an hour only, his father and lawyer were allowed to examine a list of "evidence" against him, which consisted of over 200 pages of tweets extracted from the satirical twitter accounts and a two-page document containing "confessions" made by Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, likely under duress, his family believes. He had been forced to sign and stamp the "evidence" documents which neither his father nor his lawyer received a copy of.

On 17 March, a third hearing took place during which Abdulrahman al-Sadhan's lawyer presented the defence and his father submitted a request for a temporary release of his son, but this request was ignored. The fourth session took place on 22 March in the absence of Abdulrahman al-Sadhan's father and lawyer, whom the authorities failed to inform on time. On 5 April, the Specialized Criminal Court sentenced Abdulrahman al-Sadhan to 20 years in prison followed by 20 years on travel ban. He plans to appeal the verdict.

Amnesty International's research shows that through the Specialized Criminal Court, which was initially set up as an anti-terror court, peaceful activists, religious clerics and members of the Shi'a minority are often subjected to grossly unfair trials, given lengthy prison sentences, and even sentenced to death based on so-called "confessions" that are extracted under torture. Several individuals have already been executed. This court is one of the Saudi Arabian state's most powerful tools for muzzling critical voices in Saudi Arabia.

Amnesty International is calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all individuals detained solely for peacefully advocating for reforms and defending basic human rights. Those currently serving sentences include Mohammed al-Bajadi, founding member of the now disbanded Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and prominent human rights defender; and Salman al-Awda, a reformist cleric who is facing a death sentence.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Arabic
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30 June 2021
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Abdulrahman al-Sadhan (he/him/his)