

URGENT ACTION

SAUDI ARABIAN ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Saudi Arabian human rights defender Mohammad al-Otaibi has been detained incommunicado in Saudi Arabia since 28 May, after he was deported from Qatar. He is a prisoner of conscience and at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Mohammad al-Otaibi was arrested in Doha airport, Qatar, and deported to Saudi Arabia on 25 May. He has not been in contact with his family since he called his brother on 28 May and told him he was detained in al-Dammam prison, in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. On 5 June, a relative of Mohammad al-Otaibi went to al-Dammam prison, but was not allowed to see him. He is detained incommunicado without access to his family or lawyer, putting him at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

On 24 May, at about 8pm, Mohammad al-Otaibi and his wife Salwa al-Shehri attempted to board a flight to Norway, where they had been granted refugee status. However, they were prevented from travelling by Qatari officials at Doha airport who told Mohammad al-Otaibi that he would be allowed to leave Qatar only to travel to Saudi Arabia. After leaving Doha airport to their place of residency, Mohammad al-Otaibi received a call from immigration officials asking him to return to the airport so they could resolve the travel issue. Upon arrival, he was detained by State Security officials and taken to an unknown location.

On 25 May, Mohammad al-Otaibi's brother went to the State Security headquarters in Doha and was told by Qatari officials that his brother was being held there, and that he should come back in three days. On 28 May, Salwa al-Shehri called State Security who informed her that he had been deported to Saudi Arabia. After checking his travel record online, she found that he had left Qatar for Saudi Arabia on 25 May at 3.03am, just hours after his detention at Doha airport. Mohammad al-Otaibi has been on trial since 30 October 2016, on charges stemming from his peaceful activism. His next hearing is scheduled for 12 July.

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

- Calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to release Mohammad al-Otaibi immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience being held solely in relation to the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Urging them to ensure he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and granted regular access to his family and a lawyer of his choice;
- Urging them to allow him and his wife to travel freely to Norway, for which they have valid travel documents.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 JULY 2017 TO:

King and Prime Minister

His Majesty Salman 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: +966 11 403 3125

Twitter: @KingSalman

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed

bin Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud

Ministry of the Interior, P.O. Box 2933,

Airport Road, Riyadh 11134

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: +966 11 403 3125

Twitter: @M_Naif_AlSaud

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Dr Walid bin Mohammed

bin Saleh Al-Samaani

Ministry of Justice, P.O Box 7775,

University Street, Riyadh 11137

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: +966 11 401 1741/ 402

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdul Aziz - Ambassador of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in London, Royal

Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 30 Charles Street, Mayfair, London, W1J 5DZ tel: 020 7917 3000 or 02079173288, fax 02079173113 email: ukemb@mofa.gov.sa complete the webform here:

<http://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/sites/uk/EN/ContactDiplomaticMission/Pages/ContactWithDiplomaticMission.aspx>; twitter: @SaudiEmbassyUK, Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 124/17. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/6391/2017/en/>



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mohammad al-Otaibi arrived in Qatar in February, after the Saudi Arabian authorities lifted a travel ban against him for a previous conviction stemming from his human rights work. While in Doha, the Norwegian authorities accepted him and his wife for resettlement as refugees and issued them 90-day visas in order to enter Norway. He was due to leave for Oslo with his wife at 1am on 25 May.

Mohammad al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi, both co-founders of the Union for Human Rights, were brought to trial before the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), a counter-terror court set up to look into security related offences, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital, on 30 October 2016. Both men were presented with a list of charges that includes, among others, "participating in setting up an organization and announcing it before getting an authorization"; "dividing national unity, spreading chaos and inciting public opinion by preparing, drafting and publishing statements that are harmful to the reputation of the Kingdom and its judicial and security institutions"; and "publishing information about their interrogations despite signing pledges to refrain from doing so".

Mohammad al-Otaibi was also accused of "publishing and retweeting tweets that are offensive to the Kingdom, the ruler and Arab countries"; "inciting international organizations against the Kingdom"; "adopting the constitutional monarchy project"; "participating in two media interviews"; and "inciting people to protest".

In March 2013, Abdullah Modhi al-Attawi, Mohammad Aeid al-Otaibi, Abdullah Faisal al-Harbi and Mohammad Abdullah al-Otaibi set up an independent human rights organization called Union for Human Rights. The NGO's founding statement lists among its aims: "to spread and defend the culture of human rights, enforce its principles and values, and promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights", and "to reinforce the role of women in political participation and social activities in accordance with Islamic Sharia [law]". It also aims "to abolish punitive death penalties" and "to achieve its objectives by all legally and morally legitimate means by resorting to the judiciary when deemed necessary and by activating the rule of law".

The following month, the four men were called for interrogations after they formally informed the authorities about founding the Union for Human Rights and requested a licence. The Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution (BIP) summoned all four men for interrogations and they were made to sign pledges to close down the organization. However the BIP accused Mohammad al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi of resuming their activism and opened a new case against them which began at the SCC on 30 November 2016.

Further information on UA: 124/17 Index: MDE 23/6450/2017 Issue Date: 8 June 2017