

URGENT ACTION

VERDICT UPHELD AGAINST LOUJAIN AL-HATHLOUL

On 10 March, the Specialized Criminal Court in Saudi Arabia upheld the conviction of Saudi woman human rights defender Loujain al-Hathloul, confirming a sentence of five years and eight months with conditional release. Loujain al-Hathloul had appealed the sentence handed down to her on 28 December 2020, which was based on charges including “spying with foreign parties” and “conspiring against the Kingdom”, effectively criminalizing her work promoting women’s rights and advocating for the end of the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia.

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)
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Your Majesty King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud,

*On 10 March, exactly one month after her conditional release, the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) upheld the conviction of Saudi woman human rights defender **Loujain al-Hathloul** and denied her appeal to quash her sentence. The SCC had issued its verdict on 28 December 2020, following a grossly unfair trial which included claims of torture and sexual harassment during her detention, sentencing her to five years and eight months in prison – partially suspended by two years and ten months.*

This latest judicial development, whereby the SCC upheld the verdict, effectively means that even though she is no longer behind bars, Loujain al-Hathloul is still not free. She continues to face probation, which effectively means she is at risk of re-arrest in case she violates the terms of her probation, as well as a travel ban of five years. In parallel, Loujain al-Hathloul had demanded that the regular Criminal Court investigate her claims of being subjected to acts of torture, harassment and ill-treatment during the first three months of her detention. The Criminal Court confirmed the Public Prosecutor’s decision that no torture had taken place, and effectively placing the burden of proof on Loujain al-Hathloul, who then took the case to the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal in turn confirmed the primary verdict of the Criminal Court that no torture had taken place.

Loujain al-Hathloul continues to pay a price for her peaceful activism and remains at risk of re-arrest, under severe movement restrictions, and effectively restricted from pursuing any peaceful activism. She should be free, enjoying her freedom and provided with a remedy for the violations she has suffered throughout her arbitrary detention and the unfair trial.

I urge you to ensure that Loujain al-Hathloul’s conviction and sentence are quashed, as she was detained and tried solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression. I also urge you to respect Loujain al-Hathloul’s right to movement and travel by lifting the ban imposed on her for the coming five years, as well as removing the travel ban on her parents. Furthermore, I call on you to ensure an effective investigation into the allegations that Loujain al-Hathloul was tortured, and otherwise ill-treated in prison, prosecuting those suspected of responsibility in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty and providing Loujain al-Hathloul with a remedy. Finally, I urge you to ensure Loujain al-Hathloul’s safety and protection from threats, harassment and any kind of punitive measures, to enable her to safely continue her human rights work without intimidation or fear of prosecution.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 13 March 2019, Loujain al-Hathloul was among 11 women human rights defenders (WHRDs) brought to trial before the Criminal Court in Riyadh. The court session was closed, and diplomats and journalists were banned from attending. Several women activists faced charges of contacting foreign media, other activists and international organizations including Amnesty International. Some of them were also accused of “promoting women’s rights” and “calling for the end of the male guardianship system.”

The trial of several WHRDs arrested between May and July 2018 resumed in 2020 and resulted in a number of prison sentences being handed down following unfair trials. After months of delays and prolonged detention without their trials proceeding, in November 2020 **Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Sada, Nouf Abdelaziz** and **Mayaa al-Zahrani**, were brought before the Criminal Court in Riyadh in separate trial sessions. Loujain al-Hathloul’s case was transferred to the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in December 2020 after the Criminal Court concluded that it was “outside its jurisdiction”. The SCC specializes in trying terrorism-related cases and should not be trying and sentencing peaceful activists.

On 28 December 2020, Loujain al-Hathloul was sentenced to five years and eight months in prison - partially suspended by two years and ten months - by the Specialized Criminal Court.

On 10 February 2021, Loujain al-Hathloul was conditionally released from prison and continues to face probation and a travel ban of five years. In addition, she continues to be denied access to justice and accountability for her allegations of being tortured and harassed in prison during the first three months of her detention.

The Saudi Arabian authorities continue to arbitrarily detain without charges and try individuals for their peaceful expression and human rights work. Amongst those are: Mohammed al-Bajadi, founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and prominent human rights defender who has been detained without charges or trial since May 2018; and Salman al-Awda, a reformist cleric who faces a death sentence for his peaceful expression.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Arabic

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 May 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Loujain al-Hathloul (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/3715/2021/en/>

And copies to:

HIS EXCELLENCY HRH Prince Khalid Bin Bandar Bin Sultan Al-Saud
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