

# URGENT ACTION

## TEACHER SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS FOR TWEETS

On 29 May 2024, Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) sentenced 47-year-old teacher Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi to 20 years in prison for social media posts criticizing the government's Vision 2030 programme and expressing condolences for the death in prison of a prominent human rights defender. Al-Ghamdi was arrested on 20 November 2022. According to trusted sources, he was held in solitary confinement for the first three months of his detention and has been denied access to adequate healthcare, including for his epilepsy. Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi's brother, Mohammad, was arrested five months prior to Asaad's arrest and sentenced to death in July 2023 solely over his social media posts. The Saudi authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi and quash his conviction and sentence.

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

**Waleed Mohammed Al Samani**  
Minister of Justice  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia  
Postal Code 11472, P.O Box 7775  
Email: [1950@moj.gov.sa](mailto:1950@moj.gov.sa)

Your Excellency,

*I am gravely concerned that the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in Saudi Arabia has sentenced 47-year-old teacher Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi to 20 years in prison, followed by a 20-year travel ban, solely on the basis of his social media posts on X (formerly Twitter) criticizing government policies and expressing condolences for the death in prison of prominent human rights defender and founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), Abdullah al-Hamid.*

*According to court documents reviewed by Amnesty International, al-Ghamdi was charged under the counter-terror law for crimes including "challenging the religion and justice of the King and the Crown Prince" and "supporting terrorist ideology and crimes ... and participating in hashtags for that purpose". All charges brought against him were related to his social media activity. According to trusted sources, among the posts on X considered as evidence against him during interrogation were ones where he criticized projects related to the government's Vision 2030 programme and questioned the absence of projects in Jeddah and expressed condolences for the death of a prominent human rights defender. Amnesty International has already raised concern about the arrest and sentence to death in July 2023 of Al-Ghamdi's brother, 55-year-old retired teacher Mohammad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi, solely for views he expressed on social media.*

*Al-Ghamdi was arrested on 20 November 2022 following a raid on his home. According to trusted sources, he was held in solitary confinement for the first three months of his detention. Al-Ghamdi suffers from epilepsy, and according to trusted sources he has been denied adequate healthcare in detention for his condition, and as a result he has suffered repeated fainting spells, falls and seizures. He has also been denied treatment for the injuries caused by these seizures.*

*Al-Ghamdi was denied legal representation for the first 9 months of his detention, during which he was interrogated without a lawyer in violation of his fair trial rights. He was later provided with a state-appointed lawyer who refused to meet al-Ghamdi before court sessions to prepare for his defence.*

***The Saudi authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi and quash his conviction and sentence. Pending his release, they must ensure that al-Ghamdi urgently receives adequate healthcare. I also call on you to stop misusing terrorism charges to criminalize the exercise of the human right to freedom of expression, and to repeal or substantially amend the counter-terrorism and anti-cybercrime laws, ensuring that all laws are fully compatible with international human rights law and standards.***

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 22 November 2022, security forces raided Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi's home in Jeddah and forcefully dragged him away after ransacking his home and confiscating some books and computers. Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi is the brother of both Dr Saeed bin Nasser al-Ghamdi, an Islamic scholar and government critic living in self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom, and Mohammad bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi, a 55-year-old Saudi retired teacher [sentenced](#) to death in July 2023 on trumped-up terrorism charges solely due to expressing criticism of the authorities on X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube. On 19 March 2024, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention determined that Mohammad's detention is arbitrary and in violation of his human rights.

Since 2011, Amnesty International has documented how the Saudi authorities have used the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) as an instrument of repression to silence dissent. The SCC has routinely used vague provisions under the anti-cybercrime and counter-terror laws equating the exercise of the human right to freedom of expression with "terrorism". Amnesty International has documented how [every stage of the SCC judicial process](#) is tainted by human rights violations. The SCC's judges have presided over grossly unfair trials and handed down prison sentences of up to 45 years and numerous death sentences. Among those the court has punished severely are journalists, human rights defenders, political activists, writers, religious clerics and women's rights activists.

Nearly all human rights defenders, women's rights activists, independent journalists, writers and activists in the country have been arbitrarily detained, put through prolonged and unfair trials – most often by the SCC – or released but under conditions that include travel bans and other arbitrary restrictions to their human rights, such as to prevent them to exercise their peaceful activism.

As of July 2024, Amnesty International has documented the cases of 82 individuals who had been prosecuted solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including human rights defenders, political activists, journalists, poets, and clerics. Of those, 32 were prosecuted simply for expressing their opinions on social media. Amnesty International is aware that the real number of such prosecutions is likely much higher.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Arabic, English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 17 January 2025

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

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Asaad Al-Ghamdi (He/him)

## ADDITIONAL TARGETS

The Saudi Human Rights Commission:  
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