

URGENT ACTION

TRIAL HEARING FOR IMPRISONED WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST

A hearing for fitness influencer and women's rights activist Manahel al-Otaibi is scheduled to take place before Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) on 26 May 2025. Manahel al-Otaibi has been imprisoned since 16 November 2022. On 9 January 2024 the SCC sentenced Manahel al-Otaibi to 11 years in prison for "terrorist offences" in a secret trial. She was initially charged with violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law, then faced additional charges under the counter-terror law due to her tweets in support of women's rights as well as posting photos of herself at the mall without an abaya (a traditional loose-fitting long-sleeved robe) on Snapchat. Saudi authorities have subjected her to torture and other ill-treatment, as well as enforced disappearance.

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

Waleed Mohammed Al Smani

Minister of Justice

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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Your Excellency,

I am deeply concerned about the continued arbitrary detention of fitness influencer and women's rights activist Manahel al-Otaibi. Manahel al-Otaibi informed her family that her next trial date is set for 26 May 2025 in front of the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC). The SCC was set up to try terrorism-related crimes under Saudi law. Its judges have presided over grossly unfair trials and handed down decades-long prison sentences as well as the death penalty to people detained over their expression.

On 9 January 2024, the SCC sentenced Manahel al-Otaibi to 11 years in prison for "terrorist offences" after a secret trial where she was found guilty under articles 43 and 44 of the Kingdom's Law for Combatting Terrorism and its Financing. Manahel al-Otaibi's family have not had access to her court documents, or the evidence presented against her. It is unclear whether the hearing on 26 May 2025 will be part of an appeal process or a separate case. The authorities restrict and monitor Manahel al-Otaibi's communication with her family and therefore she has not been able to inform them of details of court proceedings.

Manahel al-Otaibi was arrested on 16 November 2022 and charged with violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law for tweeting hashtags in support of women's rights and posting photos on Snapchat of herself at the mall wearing "immodest" clothing.

As well as being subjected to months-long periods of enforced disappearance Manahel al-Otaibi has also been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in al-Malaz Prison. Manahel al-Otaibi suffers from multiple sclerosis, a chronic neurological disorder. In her last phone call to her family on 11 May 2025, she reported severe pain in her leg. She has not received adequate medical care.

I urge you to order the immediate and unconditional release of Manahel al-Otaibi, as she has been convicted solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression. Pending her release, she must be granted immediate access to medical care, and her allegations of torture and other ill-treatment must be impartially investigated.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Manahel al-Otaibi's case was first heard by the Criminal Court in Riyadh. The charges against her are based on her social media posts which were "opposed to regulations and laws that relate to women", including through calling to #EndMaleGuardianship. According to court documents reviewed by Amnesty International, Manahel al-Otaibi was charged with "publishing and spreading content that contains committing public sins and inciting individuals and girls in society to renounce religious principles and social values and to violate public order and public morals on her Twitter account", in violation of the Anti-Cybercrime Law. On 23 January 2023, the Criminal Court ruled that it had no jurisdiction to try this case and referred the case to the SCC. The SCC has routinely used vague provisions under the anti-cybercrime and counter-terror laws equating peaceful expression with "terrorism". Amnesty International has documented how [every stage of the SCC judicial process](#) is tainted by human rights violations. Since 2018, Saudi authorities have arbitrarily detained Saudi women's rights activists who campaigned for the end of the male guardianship system and the right to drive in Saudi Arabia. Women's rights activists reported facing sexual harassment, torture and other forms of ill-treatment during interrogation. Those released are under travel bans and face restrictions on their freedom of expression.

Before the most recent enforced disappearance between 15 December 2025 to 15 March 2025, Saudi authorities had already forcibly disappeared Manahel al-Otaibi for over five months from 5 November 2023 until April 2024. On 14 April 2024, she called her family to inform them that she was being held in solitary confinement in al-Malaz Prison with a broken leg after being brutally beaten, and without access to medical care.

In September 2024, after a one-month period of renewed incommunicado detention, Manahel al-Otaibi was able to contact her family and she alleged she had been held in solitary confinement for a full month and subject to beatings by prison guards and fellow prisoners. She also told her family that she was forced to clean toilets, and that although she was released from solitary confinement to contact them, prison authorities had threatened that they would be sending her back. Her sister Fawzia al-Otaibi told Amnesty International that she believes the only reason Manahel al-Otaibi was finally permitted a phone call was in order to convey a message to her family to stop being publicly outspoken about her imprisonment.

Manahel al-Otaibi suffers from multiple sclerosis, a chronic neurological disorder, which her family said developed after she witnessed the arrest of her older sister, Mariam al-Otaibi. Mariam al-Otaibi, a prominent human rights defender and campaigner against the male guardianship system, was detained in 2017 for 104 days for defending women's rights and is currently subjected to a travel ban and restrictions on her freedom of expression.

Manahel al-Otaibi's other sister, Fawzia al-Otaibi, has also faced charges related to their campaigning for women's rights. In the same case against Manahel al-Otaibi submitted by the public prosecution to the Riyadh Criminal Court, the Public Prosecutor accused Fawzia al-Otaibi of leading "a propaganda campaign to incite Saudi girls to denounce religious principles and rebel against customs and traditions in the Saudi culture" and using a hashtag "which promotes liberation and the fall of male guardianship". The court document, reviewed by Amnesty International, states that a separate order would be issued for Fawzia al-Otaibi's arrest. Fawzia al-Otaibi fled Saudi Arabia fearing arrest after being summoned for questioning in 2022.

In a similar case to Manahel al-Otaibi's, on 25 January 2023, the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) resentedenced Salma al-Shehab, a Leeds University PhD student and mother of two, to 27 years in prison, followed by a 27-year travel ban upon appeal. The SCC convicted Salma al-Shehab of terrorism-related offences after a grossly unfair trial for publishing tweets in support of women's rights. On 25 September 2024, Salma al-Shehab's sentence was reduced from 27 years in prison followed by a 27-year travel ban to four years in prison, with an additional four years suspended. On 10 February 2025, she was released as she had served her prison term.

Since 2013, Amnesty International has documented the cases of 86 individuals who had been prosecuted solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including human rights defenders, peaceful political activists, journalists, poets and clerics. Of those, 40 were prosecuted for peacefully 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: English and Arabic.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 October 2025.

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Manahel al-Otaibi (she/her).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/8490/2024/en/>.

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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