

URGENT ACTION

UNJUSTLY DETAINED REFORMIST CLERIC TORTURED

Unjustly detained cleric Sheikh Salman Alodah has been held in solitary confinement for seven years - the entire duration of his detention - which amounts to torture or other ill-treatment under international law. His health is deteriorating and he has lost half of his hearing and eyesight. Sheikh Salman Alodah was arrested without a warrant on 7 September 2017, a few hours after posting a tweet praying for the “unity of hearts” during a diplomatic stand-off between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In a secret trial before the Specialized Criminal Court in 2018, he was charged with 37 offences, including supporting Arab Spring protests and calling for the release of prisoners in Saudi Arabia on social media. The prosecution has sought the death penalty in his case. Sheikh Salman Alodah is unjustly detained and Saudi authorities must immediately and unconditionally release him.

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

Walid bin Mohammad AlSama'ani

Minister of Justice

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Postal Code 11472, P.O Box 7775

Email: 1950@moj.gov.sa

Your Excellency,

I am deeply concerned about the prolonged and arbitrary detention in solitary confinement of Sheikh Salman Alodah. At 68 years old, he has spent more than seven years in solitary confinement, which amounts to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under international law and standards, and has lost half his vision and hearing.

State security officials arrested Sheikh Salman Alodah from his home on 7 September 2017 as part of a wave of arrests of writers, clerics and activists, just a few hours after he posted a [tweet](#) praying for “unity of hearts”, during a diplomatic stand-off between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. For the first few months of his detention, he was subjected to sleep deprivation and tied to a chair during interrogations. Nearly a year later, in August 2018, he was charged on 37 counts in a secret trial session in front of the counter-terror Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), including for supporting protests in the Arab world and demanding the release of prisoners in the media and on social media. In May 2019, after a second secret trial session, his lawyer informed Sheikh Salman Alodah’s family that the Public Prosecutor had sought the death penalty for him. His last court hearing was in July 2021 and his trial has been pending since.

Sheikh Salman Alodah is a prominent and influential Islamic scholar. Before 2011, he hosted a TV show on a major TV network and then later YouTube, authored dozens of books and had more than 12 million followers on his X (formerly Twitter) account. He advocated prominently for reform including for political and civil rights in Saudi Arabia. His arbitrary detention, unfair trial and potential death sentence, which appear to be politically motivated, are part of Saudi Arabia’s increasing repression of critical voices in recent years.

The Saudi authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Sheikh Salman Alodah. Until then, they must end his solitary confinement, provide him with adequate medical care and prevent further violations to his fair trial rights.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 13 November 2017, two months after Sheikh Salman Alodah's arrest, men in civilian clothing and balaclavas who were believed to be from the state security directorate searched Sheikh Salman Alodah's house and confiscated electronic devices and books. The family asked whether the men had a warrant, and the men said no. The men refused to give the family a reason for the search.

Since his detention, Sheikh Salman Alodah's entire family in Saudi Arabia are on an unofficial travel ban, a total of 19 individuals.

Sheikh Salman Alodah was detained incommunicado and in solitary confinement for the first five months of his detention, with no access to his family or a lawyer, except for one brief phone call a month after his arrest. In January 2018, he was hospitalized as his health was deteriorating. He was only allowed to call his family a month later. Although he is predominantly held in solitary confinement, Sheikh Salman Alodah has now been permitted regular visits from his family, around once a month.

In court documents reviewed by Amnesty International, Sheikh Salman Alodah is charged on 37 counts, including for association with the Muslim Brotherhood, "incitement to drag the Kingdom into internal revolutions and supporting revolutions in Arab countries by promoting clips that support the revolutions, conveying an image of what the people are suffering, and investing time in focusing on shortcomings in internal affairs, highlighting the grievances of prisoners, and promoting freedom of opinion", and "inciting discord and inciting public opinion through defamation by publishing speech on social media that included demands that touched the emotions of the masses, inciting them against the state by demanding the release of prisoners, accusing the Ministry of Interior and prisons in the Kingdom of transgression, demanding that the Ministry of Interior admit mistakes, and criticizing the Kingdom's decision-making policy".

Amnesty International has documented the Saudi authorities' increasing crackdown on freedom of expression, targeting both citizens and foreign nationals, many of whom have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. This includes criticizing the government and its policies.

Legal proceedings in these cases fall far short of international fair trial standards. Individuals are often held incommunicado without charge, in solitary confinement and denied access to lawyers or the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Since 2013, Amnesty International has documented the cases of 86 individuals who have 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 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 and English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 10 October 2025.

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Salman Alodah (he/him).

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

His Excellency Hrh Prince Khalid Bin Bandar Bin Sultan Al-Saud
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