

URGENT ACTION

TWO HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON TRIAL

Two co-founders of a Saudi Arabian human rights organization are on trial before the counter-terror court on charges related to their human rights work. Their next hearing is scheduled for 27 December. If detained they will be prisoners of conscience.

On 30 October, human rights defenders **Mohammad al-Otaibi** and **Abdullah al-Attawi** both co-founders of the Union for Human Rights, a Saudi Arabian human rights organization, were brought to trial before the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in the capital Riyadh. Both men were presented with a list of charges that includes, among other things, “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”, “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”.

Mohammad al-Otaibi, Abdullah al-Attawi and two other men were called for interrogations in April 2013 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 brought this case against them in the SCC, a counter-terror court set up to look into security related offences.

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

- Urging the authorities to drop all charges and close the case against Mohammad al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi as they are being tried solely in relation to the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Calling on them to cease the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and ensure an environment where they can work without fear of reprisals;
- Urging them to explicitly recognize the legitimacy of human rights defenders, facilitate, and publicly support their work, acknowledging their contribution to the advancement of human rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 16 DECEMBER 2016 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: (via Ministry of the Interior)
+966 11 403 3125 (please keep trying)
Twitter: @KingSalman

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
Minister of Interior
Ministry of the Interior, P.O. Box 2933,
Airport Road, Riyadh 11134
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 11 403 3125
Twitter: @M_Naif_AISaud

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/ 402 031

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.**

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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."

All of the organization's founding members have a history of activism. Mohammad Abdullah al-Otaibi is a prominent activist who was previously arrested with fellow human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Khaled al-Omair on 1 January 2009 after they helped to organize a demonstration in protest of Israel's 'Operation Cast Lead' military campaign against the Gaza Strip. On 15 May 2011, he was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison to be followed by a five-year travel ban. Mohammad Abdullah al-Otaibi was eventually released on 10 June 2012 but remains banned from travelling. The other three founding members are long-standing human rights and environmental activists who have also been previously detained for their activism. One of them was a security officer in a Saudi Arabian anti-terrorism unit who resigned in over what he considered to be inhumane practices by the security forces. On 3 April 2013 they formally informed the Saudi Arabian authorities about their newly formed organization and requested a licence. They did not hear back from the authorities until 28 April when they were called for interrogations by the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution (BIP) in Riyadh and questioned about founding and publicizing an unlicensed organization without authorization. The interrogations ended after the four founding members signed pledges to close down their organization.

According to the charge sheet presented to them on 30 October 2016, the BIP continued to monitor the activities of all four men and found that both Mohammad Abdullah al-Otaibi and Abdullah Modhi al-Attawi had resumed their activism. Mohammad al-Otaibi was additionally accused of breaching his pledge by, among other activities, attending meetings in support of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), another NGO forced to shut down in 2013, and signing statements in support of its founding members who have all been sentenced to prison; participating in two media interviews where he discussed human rights related issues; drafting reports on issues such as the harassment of Saudi Arabian human rights activists; and, writing tweets that are deemed offensive to the rulers and the state. Following this, Mohammad al-Otaibi was again summoned to the BIP for interrogations and in early May 2014 was made to sign a new pledge to refrain from talking to the media and to stop writing on social media. Despite completely ceasing his activism, he was brought to trial on 30 October 2016.

Since 2012, the Saudi Arabian authorities have been systematically targeting civil society activists and human rights defenders, using both the courts and other administrative measures, such as the imposition of travel bans, to harass, intimidate and impede their work in the defence of human rights. By early 2014 most of Saudi Arabia's prominent and independent human rights defenders have been imprisoned or scared into silence, or have fled the country.

The systematic repression of human rights defenders and activists is part of a larger campaign by the authorities to silence all forms of criticism that have revealed, either directly or indirectly, human rights violations committed by the authorities.

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