

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Saudi Arabian writer Nazeer al-Majed has been held in incommunicado detention since 18 January after being sentenced by the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh to seven years in prison. He is a prisoner of conscience at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Nazeer al-Majed, a 39-year-old school technician, writer and father of two, was sentenced on 18 January by the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), a counter-terrorism court, in the capital, Riyadh. He was sentenced to seven years in prison, to be followed by a seven-year travel ban and a fine of 100,000 Saudi Arabian riyals (about US\$26,000). He was convicted of “breaking allegiance to the ruler” by, among other things, “participating in protests and writing articles opposing the policy of the state” and “communicating with media”. The judge ordered his immediate arrest.

When Nazeer al-Majed failed to answer his phone and return home after his hearing on 18 January, his family called the SCC the following morning to inquire about his whereabouts. They were told that he had been sentenced and taken to al-Ha’ir political prison in Riyadh, where he is currently being detained. Since his arrest, he has been held incommunicado without access to his family, raising fears he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Nazeer al-Majed was previously arrested on 17 April 2011 at Jabal al-Noor public school in the Eastern Province city of al-Khobar, where he worked. He was initially held for five months in solitary confinement and detained in the Ministry of Interior’s General Directorate of Investigation (GDI) detention facilities in the Eastern Province city of Dammam, without charge or trial, until his release on 26 July 2012. In October 2016, over four years after his release, Nazeer al-Majed received a phone call summoning him to the SCC in Riyadh for trial. On 24 October 2016 his trial before the SCC commenced. He was charged with offences he allegedly committed in 2011, all of which stemmed from the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, association and assembly. At the fifth court session, on 18 January, he was detained after being sentenced to prison.

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

- Urging the Saudi Arabian authorities to release Nazeer al-Majed immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Urging them to ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and granted regular visits from his family and legal representatives.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 MARCH 2017 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
 University Street,
 PO Box 7775, Riyadh 11137
 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
 Fax: +966 11 401 1741 / 402 031
 Twitter: @MojKsa
 Salutation: Your Excellency

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

Nazeer al-Majed, was arrested on 17 April 2011, days after he published an article titled “I protest therefore I am a [good] human” (ana ahtajj izan ana adami). In the article, Nazeer al-Majed reasoned that dialogue could only take place between two equal sides and that only by protesting in the streets could people be on a par with the state, which would in turn lead to an effective dialogue. Prior to his arrest, Nazeer al-Majed published articles on philosophical, social and political issues in Arabic in print media and online. His house was searched by what were thought to be GDI personnel who failed to present either a search, nor arrest warrant. They confiscated Nazeer al-Majed’s laptop, new and old family videos, and books by exiled Saudi Arabian opposition figures, as well as the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran. His posters of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the Secretary General of the Lebanese Shi'a Muslim armed group Hizbullah, al-Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, were also confiscated. Five months into his detention, Nazeer al-Majed’s family were finally permitted to see him.

Nazeer al-Majed told family members that while in detention he was subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment, including lengthy periods in solitary confinement. He was regularly beaten while taken from his cell to the interrogation room. During questioning, he was slapped and punched in the face, kicked all over his body, and whipped with a hard instrument on his back. He was forced to stand in a stressful position for up to four hours with his arms raised and tied, and his feet shackled. Security personnel on several occasions came into his cell, ordered him to sit facing the wall and then slammed his head against the wall. He was also repeatedly questioned about his writings, and whether he watched the Iranian Al-Alam TV channel, or the Lebanese Al-Manar TV channel, the latter of which is owned by Hizbullah.

Inspired in part by protests that swept the Middle East and North Africa, Saudi Arabians in the Kingdom’s predominantly Shi'a Eastern Province have been calling for reform since February 2011. Demonstrations were organized to protest the arrest, imprisonment and harassment of members of the Shi'a community for holding collective prayer meetings, celebrating Shi'a religious festivals, and for breaching restrictions on building Shi'a mosques and religious schools.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have responded with repressive measures against those suspected of taking part in, or supporting, protests; or expressing views critical of the state. Protesters have been held without charge and incommunicado for days, sometimes weeks at a time, and some were reported to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated. At least 20 people connected with protests in the Eastern Province have been killed by security forces since 2011 and hundreds have been imprisoned. Those who have been charged are often charged with vague security-related offenses, such as “disobeying the ruler,” and their trials before the SCC, a special court set up to deal with terrorism and security-related crimes, fall short of international fair trial standards. At least 21 people have been sentenced to death over the last three years in connection with the 2011 and 2012 protests, a number of whom reported being tortured to “confess”, including four who were arrested when they were below the age of 18.

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