

UA 105/18, **UPDATE 1**, AI Index: MDE 23/0057/2019 of 18 March 2019  
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## **SAUDI ARABIA**

### **WOMEN ACTIVISTS ON TRIAL**

On 13 March 2019, 11 women activists were brought to trial at the Criminal Court in Riyadh after being detained without charge since May 2018. The women were charged with contacting international organizations, including Amnesty International, foreign media and other activists. Some of the women were also charged with promoting women's rights and calling for the end of the male guardianship system. The activists have had no access to their lawyers throughout their detention. Amnesty calls on the Saudi authorities to drop these charges and release the women activists, and others who remain detained without charge, immediately and unconditionally.

**Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Amal al-Harbi, Dr. Ruqayyah al-Mharib, Nouf Abdulaziz, Maya'a al-Zahrani, Shadan al-Anezi, Dr. Abir Namankni, Dr. Hatton al-Fassi** and **another woman** are among a group of activists who were detained following a sweeping wave of arrests since May 2018. Many of the women activists brought to trial have campaigned against the long-standing ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia, and for the end of the male guardianship system.

Up until the first trial session on 13 March, the women activists remained in detention without charge. They were detained incommunicado with no access to their families or lawyers during the first three months of their detention. Several women were subjected to sexual violence and other forms of torture and ill-treatment.

#### **Please send a fax or letter to King Salman.**

- \* Urge him to drop all charges against all 11 women activists, and to release them immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, solely detained for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- \* Ask him to allow all those detained to have access to their lawyers.
- \* Call on him to allow independent monitors into the prisons to investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual abuse.

#### **Write to**

His Majesty King 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: 011 966 11 403 3125

Twitter: @KingSalman

Salutation: Your Majesty King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud

Presidency of State Security

His Excellency General Abdul Aziz Mohammed Al-Howairini  
Olaya Secondary Street  
Olaya, Riyadh 12611 8408  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Fax: 011 966 11 412 5555  
Salutation: Your Excellency

**Please copy**

His Excellency Naif Bandir A. Alsudairy  
Ambassador for Saudi Arabia  
201 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1K6  
Fax: 613 237 0567  
Phone: 613 237 4100  
Email: [amboffice.ott@mofa.gov.sa](mailto:amboffice.ott@mofa.gov.sa)  
Via website: <http://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/sites/canada/EN/Ambassador/Pages/Contact.aspx>

Human Rights Commission

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**Additional information**

Since May 2018, at least 15 activists, including several women human rights defenders have been detained without charge in Saudi Arabia. On 19 May, the Saudi Press Agency reported that seven individuals have been arrested for their “suspicious contact with foreign entities”, “recruiting people working in sensitive government positions” and “providing financial support to hostile entities abroad with the aim of undermining the security and stability of the Kingdom and shaking the country’s social fabric”. Amongst those targeted are prominent women human rights defenders **Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan** and **Aziza al-Yousef**, who faced accusations in state-aligned media which include violating Royal Decree 44/A, a follow-up decree to the 2014 counter-terrorism law, through forming a “cell” and posing a threat to state security for their “contact with foreign entities with the aim of undermining the country’s stability and social fabric”. Royal Decree 44/A has previously been invoked in the trial of human rights defenders. In a previous case the prosecutor has sought the maximum possible punishment for the charges, which according to Royal Decree 44/A carries up to 20 years in prison for, among other things, “affiliation with religious and intellectual extremist groups or groups that are classified as terrorist organizations nationally, regionally or internationally”.

In July 2018, two prominent women human rights defenders, authorities also detained **Samar Badawi** and **Nassima al-Sada**, arbitrarily.

In June 2018 the authorities detained women's rights activists **Nouf Abdulaziz** and **Maya'a al-Zahrani**, and activists who have previously been persecuted for their human rights work, such as **Mohammed al-Bajadi** and **Khalid al-Omeir**. **Hatoon al-Fassi**, a prominent women's rights activist and academic was also reportedly detained a few days after Saudi Arabia lifted the driving ban in June 2018.

In November 2018, reports emerged that several activists, including several women arbitrarily detained since May 2018, were reportedly tortured, subjected to sexual violence and otherwise ill-treated during the first three months of their detention. (See *Saudi Arabia: Reports of torture and sexual harassment of detained activist* <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/saudi-arabia-reports-of-torture-and-sexual-harassment-of-detained-activists/>)

The wave of arrests in May 2018 is emblematic of an ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, and continued stifling of freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Since early 2018, several human rights defenders have been tried before the Specialized Criminal Court and handed down harsh prison sentences, as well as social media and travel bans under provisions of the counter-terror law, its follow up decrees and the Anti-Cyber Crime law for their peaceful human rights activism (See *Saudi Arabia: First human rights defenders sentenced under leadership of 'reformer' Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman* <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/01/saudi-arabia-first-human-rights-defenders-sentenced-under-leadership-of-reformer-crown-prince-mohammad-bin-salman/>)

On 14 March 2019, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the Universal Periodic Review outcome on Saudi Arabia in a mechanism to scrutinize the country's human rights record. Despite promises of reform during the meeting in Geneva, women activists remain in detention. (See *Saudi Arabia: Human Rights Defenders Remain in Detention Despite Promises of Reform* <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/0035/2019/en/>).



This graphic depicts (left to right) Samar Badawi, Iman al-Nafjan, Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Youssef and Nassima al-Sada