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SAUDI ARABIA

WOMEN ACTIVISTS FACE PRISON SENTENCES

Eleven Saudi women activists on trial before the Criminal Court in Riyadh risk being sentenced to prison terms on charges related to their women's rights activism. Many of them have campaigned against the long-standing ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia, and the end of the male guardianship system. While seven women activists were temporarily and conditionally released, four others remain in detention. The 11 women remain at risk of being sentenced to prison.

On 28 March 2019, women activists **Aziza al-Yousef**, **Iman al-Nafjan** and **Dr Ruqayyah al-Muharib**, who are amongst a group of 11 women activists on trial, were temporarily and conditionally released. On 2 May, **Amal al-Harbi**, **Dr Hatoun al-Fassi**, **Dr Abir al-Namankani** and **Maysaa al-Mane'a** were also temporarily and conditionally released. **Maya'a al-Zahrani**, **Nouf Abdulaziz**, **Shadan al-Anezi** and **Loujain al-Hathloul** remain detained.

The activists were detained in May 2018 following a sweeping wave of arrests targeting human rights activists. 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.

For the first 10 months of their detention, they remained held without charges. They were detained incommunicado with no access to their families or lawyers during the first three months of their detention. On their first trial session on 13 March 2019, several of the activists were charged with contacting journalists and other activists and international organizations, including Amnesty International. Since their trial began, several women activists told the court that they were tortured, ill-treated and sexually abused during the first three months of their detention. The Public Prosecution denied these allegations. In addition, diplomats and journalists have been consistently banned from attending the court sessions.

Please send a fax, tweet or letter to King Salman.

* Using your own words, express concern that, although some of the 11 women activists on trial (please name at least some) are temporarily free, all of them are at risk of receiving prison terms.

* Urge him to drop all charges against the 11 women activists, and to release immediately and unconditionally those still detained, as they are prisoners of conscience, solely detained for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

* Call on him to allow independent monitors into the prisons to investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual abuse, and to allow foreign diplomats and journalists access to the trial sessions.

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

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
Via website: <http://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/sites/canada/EN/Ambassador/Pages/Contact.aspx>

Presidency of State Security

His Excellency General Abdul Aziz
Mohammed Al-Howairini
Olaya Secondary Street
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Human Rights Commission

Dr Bandar Mohammed Abdullah al-Aiban
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Additional information

Since May 2018, at least 15 activists, including several women human rights defenders have been detained without charges 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

In July 2018, two prominent women human rights defenders, Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sada, were also arbitrarily detained. Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sada remain in detention without charges. Nassima al-Sada has been placed in solitary confinement since early February 2019. 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 Press Release: Saudi Arabia: Reports of torture and sexual harassment of detained activist, <https://bit.ly/2KkrM7d>).

Since 4 April 2019, the Saudi Arabian authorities have arrested at least 14 individuals - journalists, writers and academics including, Salah al-Haidar, the son of a woman human rights defender Aziza al-Yousef. Others include Abdullah al-Duhailan, a journalist, novelist and advocate for Palestinian rights and Fahad Abalkhail, who has supported the “Women to Drive” Campaign. In their continuing crackdown, it is no coincidence that the Saudi Arabian authorities are shamelessly targeting those citizens who are part and parcel of the society’s vibrant intellectual, artistic, and activist landscape.

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 Press Release: Saudi Arabia: First human rights defenders sentenced under leadership of ‘reformer’ Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, <https://bit.ly/2DD6FN9>)

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, several women activists remain in detention and arbitrary detentions. (See Public Statement: Saudi Arabia: Human Rights Defenders Remain in Detention Despite Promises of Reform, <https://bit.ly/2YzljLy>).