

URGENT ACTION

SUDANESE POLITICAL ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Sudanese national and political activist Alaa Aldin al-Difana is currently being held incommunicado without charge, following his arrest on 26 December 2016, raising fears he could be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. He requires access to a lawyer and medical care.

Alaa Aldin Daffalla al-Difana, 44, is a Sudanese national and an employee at a driving school, who was arrested at around 9am on 26 December 2016 by four security force officers from the Ministry of Interior in his apartment in Mecca, western Saudi Arabia. They searched his home and car and confiscated his phone and documents without an arrest or search warrant. He has since, for the most part, been held in incommunicado detention at Dhahban prison outside of Jeddah, western Saudi Arabia, putting him at risk of torture and other-ill treatment. Alaa Aldin al-Difana is a journalist and long-standing opposition activist, who has called for social and political development in Sudan. It appears that he is being detained in relation to his online activism.

Alaa Aldin al-Difana, a father of six, has been held incommunicado since 26 December, with only allowed two brief phone calls on 24 January. His family has not received any news from him since. He has had no legal representation at any point from his arrest and throughout his ongoing detention. According to his family, he is in need of medical attention as he has irritable bowel syndrome, for which he was taking prescribed medication for prior to his arrest. His family also fear he may be deported to Sudan where he would be at serious risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Alaa Aldin al-Difana is a member of the National Umma Party (*Hizb al-Umma al-Qawmi*), an opposition political party in Sudan. On his Facebook page, he wrote about medical negligence in Sudan's hospitals and corruption within Sudan's government ministries. He is also a well-known journalist and has written for various Sudanese websites. According to his family, he was previously arrested in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2012 for his activism in Sudan. He left Sudan to Saudi Arabia in 2012. Most recently, Alaa Aldin al-Difana showed his support for the November and December 2016 civil disobedience in Sudan on his Facebook page.

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

- Calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to release Alaa Aldin al-Difana immediately and unconditionally if he is detained because of his peaceful activism;
- Urging them to ensure that, pending his release, he is granted immediate access to the medical treatment he requires, prompt and regular access to his family and a lawyer of his choosing, and ensure he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment;
- Urging them, in accordance with their obligations under international law, to ensure that Alaa Aldin al-Difana is not deported to Sudan, where there is a real risk to his safety.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 APRIL 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 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_Alsaud

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Human Rights Commission

Bandar Mohammed 'Abdullah al-Aiban
P.O. Box 58889, Riyadh 11515
King Fahd Road
Building No. 3, Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 11 418 510

Also send copies to. 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 email: ukemb@mofa.gov.sa Webform: <http://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/sites/uk/EN/ContactDiplomaticMission/Pages/ContactWithDiplomaticMission.aspx>

Twitter: @SaudiEmbassyUK, Salutation: Your Royal Highness

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Amnesty International has documented the detention of two other Sudanese nationals residing in Saudi Arabia, Elgassim Mohammed Seed Ahmed, 52, and Elwaleed Imam Hassan Taha, 44, who were arrested after writing in support of the civil disobedience in Sudan on 19 December 2016, which was organized in protest of the new economic austerity measures imposed by the government. They were both arrested on 21 December 2016, while leaving their office in the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh. Elgassim Seed Ahmed is the founder of a public Facebook group called 'The tragedy of the military and Kiezan governance in Sudan', which according to the family, used to be critical of the Sudanese government but the page has been hacked since Elgassim Seed Ahmed's arrest. Elwaleed Imam is a member of the group. Their families fear that they may be deported to Sudan where they would be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

On 3 November 2016, the government of Sudan imposed new economic austerity measures to reduce the trade deficit and to stop the deteriorating exchange rate of the Sudanese Pound. The new measures have significantly increased fuel, transport, food, electricity and medicine prices. In protest against the government's new economic policy, political activists called for three-day nationwide strikes, which were widely supported, on 27 to 29 November 2016. A call was then made for a second civil disobedience action on 19 December 2016, which was supported by activists both inside and outside Sudan. In a pre-emptive move in early November 2016, the Sudanese government began arresting dozens of political activists and continually suppressed press freedom; seven newspapers have all had their issues confiscated on 23 different occasions in November and December 2016.

In another similar case documented by Amnesty International, Sudanese national Waleed Al Dood Al Makki Al Hussein (see UA 193/15 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/2416/2015/en/>) was arrested on 23 July 2015 in the city of al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province by officers from the General Directorate of Investigations. In 2005 he set up *Al Rakoba*, now one of the most popular Sudanese news websites. The website mainly publishes news items from various sources, including the Sudanese government, on political affairs, as well as social and economic issues, in the country. Many of the articles are critical of government policy and include some that have been censored in Sudanese newspapers by the government's security services.

Waleed al-Hussein was arrested at home and taken first to the GDI office in al-Khobar and later to the GDI prison in Dammam. He was held without charge and in solitary confinement for 113 days and interrogated about his criticism of the Sudanese government and his involvement with *Al Rakoba*. According to a relative, Waleed al-Hussein's interrogators told him he had been arrested at the request of the Sudanese authorities. Waleed al-Hussein was released in March 2016 after signing a pledge to "be a good citizen", "not undertake any political activity while inside and outside of the Kingdom" and "not release the secrets of the prison". Waleed al-Hussain left Saudi Arabia on 20 September 2016 for the United States.

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