

URGENT ACTION

SENTENCE CONFIRMED ON SAUDI ARABIAN WRITER

Saudi Arabian writer Nazeer al-Majed was informed on 15 May that the Court of Appeal of the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in Riyadh has upheld his seven-year prison sentence. Nazeer al-Majed has been detained since 18 January solely for having peacefully exercised his right to freedom of expression. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Nazeer al-Majed was informed on 15 May by prison officials that his seven-year sentence was upheld by the Court of Appeal of the SCC. The exact issue date of this decision is unknown. Nazeer al-Majed was not taken to the court hearing but only informed about this decision in prison. On 18 January, he was sentenced by the SCC 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 prison in Riyadh, where he was held incommunicado from 18 January until mid-February. Nazeer al-Majed was then transferred to the General Directorate of Investigation (GDI or al-Mabahith) detention facilities in the Eastern Province city of Dammam. Since then, he has had regular access to his family. He has had no legal representation since the time of his arrest.

Nazeer al-Majed's trial before the SCC commenced on 24 October 2016. Earlier that month, he had received a phone call summoning him to stand his trial. 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. He was previously arrested on 17 April 2011 and detained without charge or trial, until his release on 26 July 2012.

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

- Calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to quash Nazeer al-Majed's conviction and release him immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience sentenced solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association;
- Urging them to protect and ensure the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly for all in conformity with Saudi Arabia's international human rights obligations and commitments.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 JULY 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_AlSaud
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, email: ukemb@mofa.gov.sa; twitter: @SaudiEmbassyUK, Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 41/17. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/5655/2017/en/>

**AMNESTY
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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. This happened days after he published an article titled “I protest therefore I am a [good] human” (ana ahtajj izan ana adami). He was then 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. He was held in solitary confinement for the first five months of his detention. 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 in Arabic on philosophical, social and political issues in print media and online. His house was searched by what were thought to be GDI personnel who failed to present neither 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 in 2011, 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.