

URGENT ACTION

ISSA AL-HAMID SENTENCED TO 9 YEARS IN PRISON

Human rights defender Issa al-Hamid has been sentenced to nine years in prison after being convicted by the Specialised Criminal Court in Riyadh for his peaceful human rights activism. If detained he will be a prisoner of conscience.

Issa al-Hamid, a Saudi Arabian human rights defender and founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), was sentenced by the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh (SCC) on 24 April to nine years in prison followed by a nine year travel ban. He had been charged with “defaming the Council of Senior Religious Scholars”, “insulting the judiciary”, “participating in the establishment of an unlicensed organization” (understood to be ACPRA), “communicating false information to international organizations in order to harm the image of the state” and “violating Article 6 of the Anti-Cyber Crime Law”, among other charges. These charges relate to a number of statements published online under the name of ACPRA on a range of issues, including the “right to peaceful assembly” and “the Ministry of Interior’s repression against families of political prisoners”.

Issa al-Hamid was initially summoned to investigation by the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution in November 2013 and he was investigated for several months before his trial began on 12 June 2014 at the SCC in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. Issa al-Hamid was denied access to a lawyer and was subjected to ill-treatment throughout his investigation.

Issa al-Hamid’s brothers, Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and Dr Abdulrahman al-Hamid, are also founding members of ACPRA and have been serving lengthy prison sentences for their peaceful human rights activism in March 2013 and October 2015, respectively.

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

- Calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to ensure that Issa al-Hamid’s sentence and conviction are quashed and that he is not detained, as he is sentenced solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association;
- Calling on them to conduct a thorough, impartial and independent investigation into allegations that he was subjected to ill-treatment in custody;
- Calling on them to ensure that the criminal justice system is not misused to target or harass human rights defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 JULY 2016 TO:

King and Prime Minister

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: (via Ministry of the Interior)
+966 11 403 3125 (please keep trying)
Twitter: @KingSalman
Salutation: Your Majesty

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
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road, Riyadh 11134
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 11 403 3125
Twitter: @M_Naif_Alsaud
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

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, Fax 02079173113 Email ukemb@mofa.gov.sa Salutation His Royal Highness

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Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 86/16. Further information:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE23/3804/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since 2012, the Saudi Arabian authorities have been targeting civil society activists and human rights defenders, including members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), using both the courts and other administrative measures such as the imposition of travel bans as a means to harass, intimidate and impede their work in the defence of human rights.

Issa al-Hamid's brothers, Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and Dr Abdulrahman al-Hamid are both founding members of ACPRA who are detained for their peaceful human rights activism. Dr Abdulrahman al-Hamid was sentenced on 13 October 2015 to nine years in prison followed by a nine-year travel ban, and a fine of 50,000 Saudi Arabian riyals (about US\$13,300) (see Further Information on UA: 102/14, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/2663/2015/en/>). Dr Abdullah al-Hamid, and another ACPRA co-founder, Dr Mohammad al-Qahtani were sentenced on 9 March 2013 to 10 and 11 years' imprisonment respectively, to be followed by travel bans of equal duration. They had been convicted of a list of offences, such as "breaking allegiance to and disobeying the ruler", "questioning the integrity of officials", "seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations", "disseminating false information to foreign groups", "violating Article 6 of the information technology law" and "forming an unlicensed organization" (understood to be ACPRA) (see further information on UA 257/12, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/010/2013/en/>). The court also ordered the disbanding of ACPRA, confiscation of its property and the closure of its social media accounts.

Since February 2014, the authorities have used the new counter-terror law to further target human rights activists and peaceful dissidents. At least two ACPRA members have seen their trials reopen under the new counter-terror law at the SCC, a special security and counter-terrorism court whose jurisdiction and procedures are unspecified, years after they had been sentenced and while serving their sentence on the same charges under other laws or by other courts. Three other ACPRA members were brought to trial before the SCC after the new counter-terror law was introduced, including Dr Abdulrahman al-Hamid.

A number of other independent human rights activists, writers and dissidents have also been harassed by the Saudi Arabian authorities. Lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair, a human rights defender, was arrested on 15 April 2014 after a hearing before the SCC. He is now serving a 15-year prison sentence, to be followed by 15-year travel ban and a fine, after the court found him guilty of "disobeying the ruler and seeking to remove his legitimacy", "insulting the judiciary and questioning the integrity of judges", "setting up an unlicensed organization", "harming the reputation of the state by communicating with international organizations" and "preparing, storing and sending information that harms public order" (see UA 98/14, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/1546/2015/en/>).

In March 2016, both Mohanna Abdulaziz al-Hubail and Alaa Brinji were sentenced by the SCC to years in prison for their writings. Saudi Arabian writer and Islamic scholar Mohanna Abdulaziz al-Hubail was sentenced in absentia by the SCC to six years in prison to be followed by a travel ban of equal length. He was convicted of a number of 'offences' including violating Article 6 of the Anti-Cyber Crime Law by "insulting the state and its rulers" and "being in solidarity with imprisoned members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association" (ACRPA) on Twitter. He was also found guilty of inciting and taking part in demonstrations and calling for the release of prisoners of conscience. The court also ordered the closure of his Twitter account. Saudi Arabian journalist Alaa Brinji was sentenced to five years in prison to be followed by an eight year travel ban by the SCC after being convicted for posts on Twitter, some of which were in support of Saudi Arabian women's right to drive cars, human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience.

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