

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER FACES 11 YEARS IN PRISON

On 1 December, human rights defender Issa al-Hamid's prison sentence was increased by two years on appeal, bringing his total prison sentence to 11 years. If detained he will be a prisoner of conscience.

Saudi Arabian human rights defender **Issa al-Hamid**, a founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), an independent human rights organization, has had his sentence increased after the appeal division of the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in the capital, Riyadh, sent the case back to the SCC's first instance division with a recommendation to increase the sentence. On 1 December the court ordered him to serve an additional two years in prison, bringing his total prison sentence to 11 years, as well as an 11-year travel ban and a fine of 100,000 Saudi Arabian riyals (approximately US\$ 27,000). He has appealed his new sentence.

Issa al-Hamid was sentenced by the 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". The 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 of families of political prisoners".

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

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

- Calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to quash Issa al-Hamid's conviction, ensuring that he is not detained, as he has been sentenced solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association;
- Calling on them to conduct a prompt, impartial, independent and effective 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 23 JANUARY 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
Salutation: Your Excellency

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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 tel: 020 7917 3000 or 02079173288, fax 02079173113 email: ukemb@mofa.gov.sa complete the webform here: <http://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/sites/uk/EN/ContactDiplomaticMission/Pages/ContactWithDiplomaticMission.aspx>; twitter: @SaudiEmbassyUK, Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 86/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE23/4111/2016/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: <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: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/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 cases reopened 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.

On 30 October, human rights defenders Mohammad al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi, both co-founders of the Union for Human Rights, a Saudi Arabian human rights organization, were brought to trial before the SCC in Riyadh. Both men were presented with a list of charges that included, among other things, "participating in setting up an organization and announcing it before getting an authorization", "dividing national unity, spreading chaos and inciting public opinion by preparing, drafting and publishing statements that are harmful to the reputation of the Kingdom and its judicial and security institutions", "publishing information about their interrogations despite signing pledges to refrain from doing so". Mohammad al-Otaibi was also accused of "publishing and retweeting tweets that are offensive to the Kingdom, the ruler and Arab countries", "inciting international organizations against the Kingdom", "adopting the constitutional monarchy project", "participating in two media interviews" and "inciting people to protest". Their trial is ongoing.

Further information on UA: 86/16 Index: MDE 23/5282/2016 Issue Date: 12 December 2016