

# URGENT ACTION

## WALEED ABU AL-KHAIR STARTS HUNGER STRIKE

**Imprisoned human rights defender and lawyer, Waleed Abu al-Khair, began a hunger strike on 7 June to protest the prison authorities' refusal to provide him with adequate medical care and because of his ongoing ill-treatment.**

**Waleed Abu al-Khair**, a prominent human rights defender and lawyer who is currently serving a 15-year prison sentence for his peaceful activism, began a hunger strike at Briman prison in Jeddah on 7 June in protest at his ongoing ill-treatment by the prison authorities, including their denial of adequate medical treatment. He suffers from diabetes and intestinal complications for which he needs medical attention and a special diet that the prison authorities have refused to provide him.

Waleed Abu al-Khair has also experienced other forms of harassment. The prison authorities have refused him access to his books and only allow him once-a-week access to newspapers. On 18 April 2015 he was attacked and beaten by another prisoner in al-Ha'ir prison in Riyadh after he complained about the poor prison conditions, including the lack of access to adequate food and basic services, and corruption inside the prison. After receiving medical care at the prison's medical centre he lodged a complaint with the prison authorities and the following day three guards arbitrarily raided his prison cell and conducted a thorough and destructive search under the pretext of confiscating prohibited items.

Following his initial arrest on 15 April 2014 Waleed Abu al-Khair was taken to the Criminal Investigation Department's detention centre in Riyadh, where he was placed in solitary confinement for a few days and deprived of sleep by constant exposure to bright lights. He was later moved between different detention centres and has said that he has been repeatedly beaten and otherwise ill-treated.

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

- Urging the authorities to ensure that Waleed Abu al-Khair is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and has access to a qualified health professional who can provide health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent;
- Calling on them to release Waleed Abu al-Khair immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Expressing concerns about the continuous harassing and targeting of Waleed Abu al-Khair and other human rights defenders in prison.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 JULY 2016 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  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### **And copies to:**

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

### **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](mailto:ukemb@mofa.gov.sa) Salutation Your Royal Highness

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fourth update of UA 98/14. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE23/1546/2015/en/>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Waleed Abu al-Khair is a prominent human rights lawyer and the head of Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (previously referred to as Saudi Arabia Monitor of Human Rights), an independent human rights organization founded in 2008. He has provided legal representation to many victims of human rights violations. Among his clients is Raif Badawi.

Since 2011 Waleed Abu al-Khair has been actively harassed, monitored, banned from travelling abroad, arrested and interrogated on numerous occasions by the Saudi Arabian authorities, which have brought at least two cases against him in courts. He was arrested on 15 April 2014 at the end of his fifth court hearing before the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in the capital, Riyadh, and is currently serving his sentence in Briman prison in Jeddah. The SCC, a special security and counter-terror court whose jurisdiction and internal laws are unspecified, 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”.

The SCC sentenced Waleed Abu al-Khair on 6 July 2014 to 15 years in prison, a 15-year travel ban and a fine of 200,000 Saudi Arabian riyals (about US\$53,000), but ordered him to serve only 10 years in prison. The appeal judge who upheld his sentence upon appeal on 12 January however, ordered him to serve the full 15-year prison sentence because he has refused to apologize for his “offences”. Waleed Abu al-Khair continues to refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the SCC.

Scores of other human rights defenders and civil society activists have borne the brunt of the authorities’ clampdown over recent months. They include members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), an organization set up in October 2009 that has reported on human rights violations and helped many families of detainees held without charge. At least 12 founding and active members of the organization have since been imprisoned or detained without charge, sentenced to lengthy prison terms, or released after serving many years in prison.

Many of those human rights defenders and activists currently imprisoned have reported harassment and ill-treatment. Most of them have complained about their prison conditions and discriminatory treatment. Their books and personal belongings have been arbitrarily confiscated. At some point during their detention, they have experienced the severe overcrowding of a Saudi Arabian prison where wards that are equipped to accommodate 80 prisoners commonly contain 300 or more inmates sleeping on the floor, often without mattresses or blankets and frequently having to queue for long periods to use the toilet. For prolonged periods of time, some of them received poor food and rarely saw the sun. Many activists serving prison sentences are held together with other convicted prisoners, including some convicted of violent crimes.

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