

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER JAILED FOR ONLINE ACTIVISM

Saudi Arabian human rights defender Essam Koshak has been detained since 8 January 2017 for his online activism. He is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

On 8 January, **Essam Koshak** received a phone call from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Mecca, summoning him to al-Mansour police station. On arrival, at 5pm the same day, he was interrogated by the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution (BIP) about his Twitter account, which he uses to highlight human rights issues in Saudi Arabia, including the detention of human rights defenders and activists. During the first three days of interrogation, his request to have his lawyer present was denied.

On 12 January, Essam Koshak's detention was extended by four days and his lawyer was finally allowed to be present during his interrogations. He was transferred on the same day to Mecca General Prison where he is currently being held.

Essam Koshak is a computer engineer and human rights activist who uses social media to call for reform and respect for human rights in Saudi Arabia.

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

- Urging the Saudi Arabian authorities to release Essam Koshak immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to ensure that, pending his release, he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and is granted prompt and regular access to his family and a lawyer of his choosing;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that, while he is detained, his due process rights are upheld and that any legal proceedings against him conform to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 MARCH 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 tel: 020 7917 3000 or 02079173288, fax 02079173113 email: ukemb@mofa.gov.sa

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since 2012, the Saudi Arabian authorities have systematically targeted civil society activists and human rights defenders, using both the courts and other administrative measures, such as the imposition of travel bans, to harass and intimidate them and impede their work on the defence of human rights. By early 2014, most of Saudi Arabia's prominent and independent human rights defenders had been imprisoned, scared into silence, or forced to flee the country. The systematic repression of human rights defenders and activists is part of the authorities' larger campaign to silence all forms of criticism that reveal, either directly or indirectly, the human rights violations committed by the authorities. As well as leading human rights defenders, persons targeted by the authorities include: online activists; the family members of victims of human rights violations; dissident Saudi Arabian Shi'a Muslims who criticise the discrimination against members of their community; and anyone daring to reach out or associate with international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.

The recent arrest and detention of Essam Koshak is another example of the authorities' relentless attack on freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia; especially online activism and the use of social media to discuss human rights issues and advocate reform. Another human rights defender, Issa al-Nukheifi, has been detained since 18 December 2016. He was questioned on several occasions about his human rights work- particularly his online activism which included tweets he had sent out in support of members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and other detainees; as well as his role in setting up "Saudi Popular Parliament", a Twitter account set up on 10 December 2016 aimed at promoting democracy in Saudi Arabia.

On 30 October 2016, human rights defenders Mohammad al-Otaibi and Adbullah al-Attawi, both co-founders of the Union for Human Rights, a Saudi Arabian human rights organization, were brought to trial before the Specialised Criminal Court, in Riyadh. Both men were presented with a list of charges that included, "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", and "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.

UA 25/17 Index: MDE 23/5561/2017 Issue Date: 31 January 2017

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