

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST RISKS DEATH PENALTY FOR TWEETS

Saudi Arabian journalist Alaa Brinji is on trial at the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh. He has been charged with apostasy and risks being sentenced to death. He has been denied access to a lawyer. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Journalist **Alaa Brinji** is on trial at the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh. He has been charged with, among other things, "apostasy", "calling for secularist thought", "inciting the public against the rulers of the country and attempting to tarnish the country's reputation", "ridiculing Islamic religious figures" and "violating Article 6 of the Anti-Cyber Crime Law". The charges relate to his posts on Twitter, some of which call for freedom of religion and supporting the "women to drive" movement, human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience.

Alaa Brinji, aged 39, was arrested on 12 May 2014 by members of the security forces, some of them in civilian clothes, at a checkpoint on his way to Bahrain with his wife. He was taken to the General Directorate of Investigations (GDI, also known as *al-Mabahith*) prison in Dammam, where he is still detained. He was detained incommunicado in solitary confinement for the first 50 days, after which he was allowed to phone his wife. His trial is thought to have begun in December 2015. He has been allowed no access to a lawyer.

Alaa Brinji is a respected journalist who has worked for the Saudi Arabian newspapers *al-Bilad* and *al-Sharq*.

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

- Urging the authorities to release Alaa Brinji immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Calling on them to ensure that he has access to a lawyer throughout his detention and trial;
- Calling on the authorities to repeal or amend all laws that arbitrarily restrict the rights to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 APRIL 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 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 (please keep
trying)

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

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities have systematically repressed all forms of peaceful dissent and activism since 2012 by targeting activists and dissidents. By early 2014, most of Saudi Arabia's prominent and independent human rights defenders had been either imprisoned or scared into silence, or had fled the country. Most of them had already been subjected to arbitrary travel bans, and had been intimidated and harassed by the security forces, particularly by the Ministry of Interior's General Directorate of Investigations, before being prosecuted and given harsh sentences. Many of them were sentenced after grossly unfair trials by the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), a special security and counter-terrorism court whose jurisdiction and procedures are unspecified.

The systematic repression of human rights defenders is part of a larger campaign to silence all forms of criticism that have revealed, directly or indirectly, human rights violations committed by the authorities. People targeted have included the country's leading human rights defenders, such as women's rights activists, relatives of victims of human rights violations, dissident Saudi Arabian Shi'a Muslims who have criticized discrimination against their community and anyone who communicates with international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.

Saudi Arabia imposes the death penalty on those convicted of "offences" that are not recognizably criminal under international human rights law. These include apostasy, adultery, witchcraft and sorcery. Under international law, the death penalty can only be imposed for the "most serious crimes", which has been most recently interpreted by UN experts to refer to "intentional killing". "Apostasy" does not meet that threshold – and indeed should not be a crime at all, since it is not a recognizably criminal offence under international law, and it negates the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, regardless of who is accused, the crime, their guilt or innocence or method of execution.

Name: Alaa Brinji
Gender m/f: m

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