

# URGENT ACTION

## DEATH SENTENCE FOR JUVENILE OFFENDER

**A Saudi Arabian Shi'a man has been sentenced to death by the Specialized Criminal Court for offences that occurred when he was 16 years old. He says he was held incommunicado in solitary confinement for five months and tortured into "confessing".**

**Abdulkareem al-Hawaj** was sentenced to death on 27 July by the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in Riyadh for a range of offences including "throwing two Molotov cocktails", "participating in riots that resulted in the shooting of an armoured vehicle", "participating in illegal gatherings and chanting against the state" and using social media to share photos and videos of demonstrations in al-Qatif and Bahrain and to "insult the leaders". According to court documents, these acts were carried out during Ramadan in August 2012, when Abdulkareem al-Hawaj was aged 16. The court appears to have based its decision solely on "confessions" which he says he was forced into making while he was held incommunicado and tortured. The family has appealed the sentence.

According to information received by Amnesty International, Abdulkareem al-Hawaj was arrested on 16 January 2014 at a security checkpoint in al-Awamiyyah, a village in the al-Qatif region of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. He was taken to the General Directorate of Investigations (GDI or al-Mabahith) prison in al-Qatif where he has said the prison guards beat him with their hands, shoes and sticks. After a week he was moved to the GDI prison in Dammam, eastern Saudi Arabia, where he was allegedly tortured, including being beaten and threatened with the death of his family, during interrogations by officers of the GDI to make him write and sign a "confession".

Abdulkareem al-Hawaj had no access to a lawyer during pre-trial detention and interrogations and has said that he was held incommunicado in solitary confinement for the first five months. His family looked for Abdulkareem al-Hawaj in the police stations and prisons of al-Qatif but were told by officials that he was not held in those locations. They only learnt of his whereabouts when an official from the GDI prison in Dammam, where he is currently detained, telephoned them approximately five months after his arrest and told them they were holding him and that they could now visit. According to court documents he was held without charge for over two years. He denies all charges against him and denies participating in any of the acts attributed to him by the prosecution.

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

- Urging the authorities to quash the conviction of Abdulkareem al-Hawaj, and order a retrial in line with international fair trial standards without recourse to the death penalty;
- Calling on them to order an independent investigation into his allegation of torture and other ill-treatment;
- Reminding them that Saudi Arabia is a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which strictly prohibits the use of the death penalty for crimes committed by persons below the age of 18;
- Urging them to immediately establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty in Saudi Arabia.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 OCTOBER 2016 TO:

King and Prime Minister  
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 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**

### 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](mailto: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

Saudi Arabia is one of the most prolific executioners in the world, putting more than 2,200 people to death between 1985 and 2015. So far this year it has executed at least 118 people.

Saudi Arabia also sentences people to death, and executes them, for crimes committed when they were below 18 years of age, in violation of the country's obligations under customary international law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The authorities repeatedly fail to abide by international standards for fair trial and UN Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty. Trials in death penalty cases are often held in secret and their proceedings are unfair and frequently summary, with no legal assistance or representation for those accused through the various stages of detention and trial. Defendants may be convicted solely on the basis of "confessions" obtained under torture or other ill-treatment.

Tensions between the Shi'a Muslim community and the Saudi Arabian authorities have increased since 2011 when, inspired in part by protests that swept the Middle East and North Africa region, Saudi Arabians in the Kingdom's predominantly Shi'a Eastern Province stepped up public calls for reforms. Since 2011, demonstrations have also been organized to protest against the arrest, imprisonment and harassment of members of the Shi'a community for holding collective prayer meetings, celebrating Shi'a Muslim religious festivals and breaching restrictions on building Shi'a mosques.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have responded with repressive measures against those suspected of taking part in or supporting protests or expressing views critical of the state. Protesters have been held without charge and incommunicado for days or weeks at a time, and some say they have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Of those whose cases have moved to the courts, many have been charged solely with taking part in demonstrations.

Among those sentenced to death in relation to the protests, and in addition to Abdulkareem al-Hawaj, are Ali al-Nimr, the nephew of prominent Shi'a cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, who was executed alongside 46 others on 2 January, who was 17 when he was arrested, and Abdullah al-Zaher and Dawood al-Marhoon, who were 16 and 17 years respectively when they were arrested.

Ali al-Nimr was sentenced to death on 27 May 2014 by the SCC in Jeddah, after being convicted of charges similar to those levelled against Abdulkareem al-Hawaj (see UA 143/14, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/014/2014/en/>). Dawood al-Marhoon and Abdullah al-Zaher were sentenced by the SCC in Riyadh on 22 October the same year, also on similar charges. In all three cases the court seems to have based its decisions on "confessions" which Ali al-Nimr, Abdullah al-Zaher and Dawood al-Marhoon have said were extracted under torture and other ill-treatment.

Under international human rights law, the death penalty can only be imposed for the "most serious crimes", which has been interpreted by UN experts as referring to crimes that involve "intentional killing".

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