

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ON HUNGER STRIKE

Human rights defender Khaled al-Omair has been on hunger strike since 6 October in protest at his continuing detention. He was due to be released on 5 October after completing his eight-year prison sentence. He is a prisoner of conscience.

On 6 October **Khaled al-Omair**, a human rights defender and retired security guard, began a hunger strike in protest at his continuing imprisonment despite expiry of his sentence. He was supposed to be released on 5 October after completing his eight-year prison sentence, but remains in detention at al-Ha'ir political prison, in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, for unknown reasons. It is understood by Amnesty International that he has a number of long-term health conditions, including heart and kidney problems, for which he takes medication.

Khaled al-Omair was sentenced by the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh, to eight years in prison to be followed by a travel ban of equal duration on 15 May 2011, after the court found him guilty of a range of charges, including calling for and inciting protests and promoting demonstrations via the internet. He was denied access to a lawyer throughout his trial and pre-trial detention. He has reported being tortured and otherwise ill-treated, including being placed in solitary confinement for prolonged periods of time and being blindfolded for hours ahead of interrogations in pre-trial detention.

Khaled al-Omair was arrested on 1 January 2009 on al-Naheda Street in Riyadh, where a protest against Israel's then-current military action in Gaza had been due to take place. He was arrested before the march even began. He was first detained in al-Ha'ir general prison, until December 2009 when he was transferred to al-Ha'ir political prison. In al-Ha'ir political prison he was placed in solitary confinement for the first seven months after the prison authorities suspected him of leaking video footage of a prisoner who had allegedly been tortured.

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

- Urging the authorities to release Khaled al-Omair immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Urging them to ensure he has adequate access to qualified health professionals providing health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent;
- Calling on them to refrain from taking any punitive measures against him as a punishment for his hunger strike;
- Calling on them to open an independent investigation into his allegation of torture and other ill-treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 DECEMBER 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
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 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.**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Khaled al-Omair was arrested along with fellow human rights defender and prisoner of conscience, Mohammed al-Otaibi, on 1 January 2009 after they helped to organize a demonstration in protest of Israel's 'Operation Cast Lead' military campaign against the Gaza Strip. The two men were arrested before the demonstration began on al-Naheda Street in Riyadh where the march had been due to start from.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have never tolerated protests taking place and those who try to organize or participate in them are often arrested, held incommunicado without charge and denied access to the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. However, after a protest against the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip launched on 27 December 2008, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior was reported as making an explicit announcement on 30 December 2008 that protests were banned in Saudi Arabia. In response to planned pro-reform protests in early 2011, the Interior Ministry reaffirmed the total ban on public demonstrations in an announcement on 5 March 2011. Those who break the ban are charged with "participating in or calling for demonstrations" and "disobeying the ruler" and face imprisonment accordingly. In some cases, the authorities have punished peaceful demonstrators through harsher sentences by adding additional charges such as "inciting violence", "inciting the people against the authorities", and even "using violence" where there has been no evidence to support those charges.

In early 2011 an unknown group of Saudi Arabian activists had created a page on Facebook called "the people want to overthrow the regime". The group called for an elected Shura Council, a fully independent judiciary, the release of all political prisoners, the exercise of freedom of expression and assembly and the abolition of all duties and taxes. In Riyadh after Friday prayer on 4 March 2011, a rally was held aimed at building momentum for what was planned to be a major demonstration, the "Day of Rage", on 11 March. Khaled al-Johani, a teacher and the sole protestor to reach the site of the planned "Day of Rage" demonstration in Riyadh on 11 March, was arrested minutes after giving an interview to BBC Arabic during which he spoke about the lack of freedoms in Saudi Arabia. After a year in detention he was brought to trial before the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh in February 2012 and charged with a number of offences, which according to local sources included "supporting demonstrations", "being present at the location of a demonstration" and "communication with foreign media in a manner that harmed the reputation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia". On 8 August 2012 Khaled al-Johani was released from prison. The conditions of his release and his exact legal status are not known to Amnesty International.

Since 2012 the Saudi Arabian authorities have been systematically targeting civil society activists and human rights defenders, 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. By early 2014 most of Saudi Arabia's prominent and independent human rights defenders had been 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 the Ministry of Interior's General Directorate of Investigations (GDI, also known as al-Mabahith), before being prosecuted and given harsh sentences.

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