

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER SETENCED TO PRISON

A Saudi Arabian criminal court has sentenced human rights defender Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder to eight years' imprisonment and a 10-year travel ban. He is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder, 48, was sentenced to eight years in prison and a 10-year travel ban by a criminal court in Buraydah – 350km north of the capital Riyadh – on Monday 24 June. He was convicted on charges including disobeying the ruler, inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations, harming the image of the state by disseminating false information to foreign groups, and taking part in founding an unlicensed organization.

Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder had been on trial since January 2013. On 10 April, he had submitted a request to have the presiding judge removed from his case, but to no avail. Al-Khoder argued that the judge had publicly expressed negative opinions about him before the trial and was therefore not impartial. He was detained on his fourth trial session on 24 April when he refused to enter the courtroom after the judge arbitrarily denied women access to the court session.

Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder is a founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and was professor of Comparative Jurisprudence at the Faculty of Islamic Jurisprudence at Qassim University until October 2011 when he was dismissed from his position, arguably because of his activism. He had been under a travel ban since 2010. Five of the eight years of his prison sentence will be suspended if he agrees to a condition that he does not return to activism following his release.

Please write immediately Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to release Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for the exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Asking them to ensure he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given immediate and regular access to his family and lawyer.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 09 AUGUST 2013 TO:

King and Prime Minister

King Abdullah 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)
011 966 1 403 3125 (please keep trying)
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Shaykh Dr Mohammed bin
 Abdulkareem Al-Issa
 Ministry of Justice
 University Street, Riyadh 11137
 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: 011 966 1 401 1741/ 011 966 1 402
0311
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of the Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin
 Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
 Ministry of the Interior, P.O. Box 2933,
 Airport Road, Riyadh 11134
 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: 011 966 1 403 3125 (please keep
trying)

Also send copies to:

Ambassador Adel A. Al-Jubeir
 Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
 601 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington DC 20037
Phone: 1 202 342 3800 | Fax: 1 202 944 5983
Email: info@saudiembassy.net

Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Network office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities have recently unleashed a widespread campaign of persecution of human rights defenders, both through the courts and through arbitrary measures, such as the imposition of travel bans. Members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), set up in October 2009, have received the brunt of the authorities' repression. ACPRA has reported on human rights violations and helped many families of detainees held without charge to bring cases against the Ministry of Interior before the Board of Grievances, an administrative court with jurisdiction to consider complaints against the state and its public services.

On 9 March 2013, two ACPRA co-founders – Dr. Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali al-Hamid, 66, and Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih al-Qahtani, 47 – were sentenced to 10 and 11 years' imprisonment, respectively, to be followed by travel bans of equal duration. They were convicted for a list of offences among them breaking allegiance to and disobeying the ruler, questioning the integrity of officials, seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations, disseminating false information to foreign groups, violating Article 6 of the information technology law and forming an unlicensed organization, understood to be ACPRA (see FU UA 257/12, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/010/2013/en>). The court also ordered the disbanding of ACPRA, confiscation of its property and the closure of its social media accounts.

Fowzan al-Harbi, another co-founder and current vice-president of ACPRA, has also been under investigation since 11 May 2013, facing similar charges to his colleagues. His continuing efforts to keep ACPRA going despite the court order to disband it could land him with an even heavier sentence. It is feared that he will soon be tried and imprisoned along with the others.

Earlier, on 10 April 2012 the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh, which was set up to deal with terrorism and security-related cases, sentenced Mohammed Saleh al-Bajady, a co-founder of ACPRA, to four years' imprisonment followed by a five-year travel ban. He was reportedly convicted of charges relating to involvement in the establishment of an unlicensed organization, harming the image of the state through the media, calling on the families of political detainees to protest and hold sit-ins, contesting the independence of the judiciary and having banned books in his possession (see FU UA 91/11, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/010/2012>). Al-Bajady went on hunger strike in prison in September 2012 and has not been heard from since. On 24 March 2013, his lawyer, Fowzan al-Harbi, submitted a written request to and attempted to meet the director of the al-Ha'ir prison where al-Bajady is reportedly being detained. He has yet to be granted a visit to his client nor has he received a reply to his written request to do so. In June 2013, al-Bajady's mother sent appeals to the Saudi Arabian authorities to reveal the fate of his son and went on a hunger strike for four days before medical doctors advised her to stop because of her age and health issues. The Saudi Arabian authorities claim that al-Bajady is refusing to accept visitors or talk to family over the phone.

A number of other independent human rights groups and activists have also been harassed by the Saudi Arabian authorities. Waleed Abu al-Khair, the head of Saudi Arabian Monitor for Human Rights, has been on trial for 19 months and under a travel ban. Sadek al-Ramadan, the General-Secretary of the Adala Center for Human Rights, was arbitrarily banned from travelling without an explanation in March 2013. Founding members of a new human rights organization, Union for Human Rights, have been under interrogation since March 2013 and were threatened with prosecution if they did not cease their group activity. Six prominent reformists, including Dr Suliaman al-Rashhudi and Dr Saud al-Hashimi, have been serving lengthy prison terms since late 2012 after they circulated a petition calling for political reform and discussed a proposal to establish an independent human rights organization (see UA 107/13, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/014/2013/en>).

Name: Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder (m)
Issues: Prisoner of conscience, Risk of torture, Unfair trial

UA: 167/13
Issue Date: 28 June 2013
Country: Saudi Arabia