

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST DETAINED AFTER PROTEST

Mohammad Salih al-Bajadi, a 30-year-old businessman who co-founded a human rights organization in Saudi Arabia, was arrested on 21 March after attending a protest the day before. He has been held incommunicado since, placing him at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Mohammad Salih al-Bajadi is one of the founders of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), established in October 2009 but not officially recognized. He was arrested at his home in the town of Buraidah in the province of al-Qassim, north of the capital, Riyadh, in the evening of 21 March. He was taken away by uniformed security force agents and men in civilian clothes believed to be members of the Ministry of Interior's General Intelligence, who also reportedly confiscated books, documents and a laptop from his home. They then escorted him to his office where they are said to have confiscated more books, documents and another computer and to have filmed the inside of his office.

The previous day, he had attended a protest in Riyadh, outside the offices of the Ministry of Interior. He had tweeted messages about the protest beforehand. He may be held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and may therefore be a prisoner of conscience.

The protest, which was said to have lasted for a few hours, was reported to have been attended by scores of men and women. They were calling for the release of their male relatives, who have been detained for years without charge or trial. A number of those who attended the protest were arrested, including some of the women. The women were said to have been released after they were made to fingerprint statements confirming that they had attended the protest. The men who were arrested at the protest are believed to be still detained.

Mohammad Salih al-Bajadi has been arrested twice before in recent years. In 2007 he was arrested and detained, apparently in relation to his human rights activities.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to ensure that Mohammad Salih al-Bajadi and others arrested after the 20 March protest in Riyadh are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to family, lawyers and any medical attention they may require;
- Calling for their immediate and unconditional release if they are being held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression or association;
- Asking for details of any charges he faces to be made public and calling on the authorities to ensure that any legal proceedings against him conforms to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 MAY 2011 TO:

Second Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of the Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin
'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud, Ministry of the
Interior, P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road
Riyadh 11134

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**Fax: +966 1 403 3125 (please keep
trying)**

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

King

His Majesty 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)
+966 1 403 3125 (please keep trying)**

Salutation: Your Majesty

And copies to:

President, Human Rights Commission
Bandar Mohammed 'Abdullah al-Aiban

Human Rights Commission
P.O. Box 58889, King Fahad Road,
Building No. 373, Riyadh 11515
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Email: hrc@haq-ksa.org

Salutation: Dear Dr al-Aiban

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Although Amnesty International is not aware of any legal text banning demonstrations, in practice the Saudi Arabian authorities have generally not tolerated them taking place. 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 legality of their detention.

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 in the Saudi Arabia were banned. Following the protests at the beginning of March 2011 in al-Qatif (see *Protesters arrested in Saudi Arabia*, 7 March 2011, UA 61/11, Index: MDE23/005/2011) and amid reports that further protests calling for reform in Saudi Arabia were planned, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement on 5 March confirming the ban on demonstrations in the Kingdom. According to the statement, security forces would take “all necessary measures” against those who attempt to disrupt order.

The following day, 6 March, the Council of Senior Ulema (religious scholars) also emphasized the prohibition of demonstrations in the country. They forbade and warned against using demonstrations or other means that, according to them, stir discord and division in society and stated that these were not the appropriate means for calling for reform or giving advice. On the same day, the Shura Council (a consultative council appointed by the King) stressed the importance of preserving the security of the Kingdom and ignoring misleading calls for the organization of demonstrations, sit-ins and marches, which, they argued, were incompatible with the principles of Islamic law.

Critics of the Saudi Arabian government face gross human rights violations at the hands of security forces under the control of the Ministry of Interior. They are often held incommunicado without charge, sometimes in solitary confinement, prevented from consulting lawyers and denied access to the courts to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Torture or other ill-treatment is frequently used to extract confessions from detainees, to punish them for refusing to “repent”, or to force them to make undertakings not to criticize the government. Incommunicado detention in Saudi Arabia often lasts until a confession is obtained, which can take months and occasionally years.

Saudi Arabia is a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which prohibits the use of evidence extracted under torture or other ill-treatment. Article 15 states: “Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made.”

Thousands of people have been arrested arbitrarily in Saudi Arabia since 11 September 2001, including peaceful critics of the state and human rights activists. For example, at least seven men were arrested in February 2007 in the cities of Jeddah and Madinah after they circulated a petition calling for political reform and discussed a proposal to establish an independent human rights organization in Saudi Arabia. Among those still detained include Dr Saud al-Hashimi, Al-Sharif Saif al-Ghalib, Dr Musa al-Qirni, Dr ‘Abdel Rahman al-Shumayri, Fahd al-Qirshi, ‘Abdel Rahman Khan and Sulieman al-Rushudi. They had also challenged the impunity enjoyed by Ministry of Interior officials who carry out arrests and detentions. The Ministry of Interior claimed in a statement that they were arrested because they were collecting money to support terrorism; the detainees deny this. Relatives of the seven men were among those protesting on 20 March 2011.

For more information, please see Amnesty International’s report *Saudi Arabia: Assaulting human rights in the name of counter-terrorism*, issued on 22 July 2009 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/saudi-arabia-human-rights-abuses-name-fighting-terrorism-20090722>), and the update to the report *Saudi Arabia: Countering terrorism with repression*, issued on 11 September 2009 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/025/2009/en>).

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