

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 312/08 (MDE 23/045/2008, 11 November 2008) Fear of Torture and other ill treatment – New concern: Health concern and Prisoners of Conscience

SAUDI ARABIA Sulieman al-Rushudi (m), retired judge
Dr Saud al-Hashimi (m), medical doctor
Al-Sharif Saif Al-Ghalib (m)
Dr Musa al-Qirni (m), university professor
Dr 'Abdel Rahman al-Shumayri (m), university professor
Fahd al-Qirshi (m)
'Abdel Rahman Khan (m)
'Abdelaziz al-Khariji (m)

Released Dr Matrouk al-Faleh (m), university professor and human rights activist

Dr Saud al-Hashimi has been on hunger strike at Dhahban prison in western Saudi Arabia since 1 June 2009. On 5 and 6 June he is reported to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated for refusing to consume food; he was stripped of all his clothes, except his underwear, shackled and dragged from his cell and placed in a severely cold cell for about five hours. He is now reported to be in need of medical treatment.

Dr Matrouk al-Faleh was released on 10 January 2009 after more than seven months in detention without charge or trial. He was arrested in the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh, on 19 May 2008 and held at al-Ha'ir prison for political detainees in Riyadh. The Saudi Arabian authorities have not disclosed the reason for Dr Matrouk al-Faleh's arrest and detention, but it is believed to have been related to his publication of an article that he wrote on 17 May 2008 about his visit to a prison to see two prisoners of conscience, who have since been released.

With the exception of Dr Matrouk al-Faleh, all those named above continue to be detained without charge or trial. They were arrested in February 2007 in the cities of Jeddah and Madinah. They have since been held in solitary confinement at Dhahban prison and remain at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience detained for their advocacy of peaceful political change and the protection and promotion of human rights. They were targeted by the authorities after they circulated a petition calling for political reform and discussed a proposal to establish an independent human rights organization in Saudi Arabia. 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.

Dozens of human rights activists in Saudi Arabia participated in a hunger strike on 6 and 7 November 2008, to protest against the detention and solitary confinement of the prisoners of conscience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Critics of the state are subject to gross violations of their rights at the hands of various security forces under the control of the Ministry of Interior. They are often held incommunicado without charge or trial, denied access to lawyers and the courts to challenge the legality of their detention, and tortured. Trials fall far short of international standards for fair trial: defendants are generally denied legal counsel, and in many cases they and their families are not informed of the progress of legal proceedings against them. Court hearings are often held behind closed doors.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have used the so-called “war on terror” to justify the arrest and detention of thousands of government critics and opponents without charge or trial. In a statement in 2007 the Ministry of Interior announced that they were holding at least 3,000 suspects on counter-terrorism grounds. It also disclosed that that they were among 9,000 people detained between 2003 and 2007 as part of the counter-terrorism measures. More recently, the Ministry of Interior announced that 991 detainees were being tried. The trials are being held in secret with no legal assistance provided for the defendants, including defendants being tried on capital charges.

Incommunicado detention and solitary confinement are routine practices in Saudi Arabia. Both are used, along with torture and other ill-treatment, 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.

The UN Human Rights Committee has commented that routine prolonged solitary confinement is inconsistent with the obligation on states to ensure prisoners are treated with humanity and with respect for their inherent dignity. (General comment 21/44, 6 April 1992).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or English or your own language: -

- expressing concern about reports that Dr Saud al-Hashimi was tortured or otherwise ill-treated while held at Dhahban prison in western Saudi Arabia;
- asking for the allegations of torture to be investigated by an independent and impartial body and for anyone found responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to provide Dr Saud al-Hashimi with all necessary medical treatment without delay;
- expressing concern that he and the seven other men are being held in solitary confinement;
- calling on the authorities to release the men immediately and unconditionally as they are held solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to express their conscientiously held beliefs;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all the detainees are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to their families, their lawyers and any medical attention they may require.

APPEALS TO:

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 1185 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Majesty

His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz Al-Saud

Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior

Ministry of the Interior, P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road, Riyadh 11134, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: +966 1 403 1185 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

COPIES TO:

Mr Bandar Mohammed Abdullah Al Aiban

President, Human Rights Commission

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

Fax: +966 1 4612061

and to diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 July 2009.