

PUBLIC

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UA 52/05 Medical Concern/Possible prisoner of conscience

SAUDI ARABIA Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air (m), aged about 55, university professor

University Professor Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air has been in jail since April 2004 for criticising the government. His health is reportedly failing, and the prison authorities may be denying him access to adequate medical treatment. Amnesty International believes he may be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the legitimate exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air was arrested in April 2004 in connection with a statement he made on terrorism in Saudi Arabia, during a debate on the satellite TV station *Al-Jazeera*. The government accused him of supporting terrorism, but his family and supporters deny this. In September he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment after an unfair trial. The verdict was upheld by the Court of Cassation on 14 February. He is held at al-Ha'ir prison, in the capital, Riyadh.

At the trial he was denied access to legal representation of his own choosing, and in protest he has been on hunger strike almost continuously since August. His family believes that he survives only on water and sugar: in the intervals between his hunger strikes he has been unable to eat the prison food as it is so bad that it makes him feel sick. His health has been deteriorating steadily. Shortly after he began the hunger strike he was taken to a local hospital for treatment. A doctor reportedly told him that he had rheumatism, and that exposure to sunlight would help the condition. Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air is said to be held in solitary confinement, with no outdoor exercise, and therefore has no exposure to sunlight.

On 23 February Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air reportedly contacted his family for the first time in eight months. He told them that he had lost weight. He said that he was only drinking water, and that "my legs can hardly carry me". He said he had asked the prison authorities repeatedly to let him see a doctor, but they had refused. He apparently said that he believed he would be dead in a matter of weeks. On 27 February he was allowed his first visit from his family since his detention, during which prison guards were present. His family said that he had lost approximately 30kg.

Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air had been released in March 2003 after eight years of detention without charge or trial, which followed earlier criticisms of the government.

Two of his sons, Sa'ad Bin Sa'id Bin Zu'air and Mubarak Bin Sa'id Bin Zu'air, were also detained after they campaigned for their father's release. Mubarak Bin Sa'id Zu'air has been temporarily released to allow him to sit a university examination, but Sa'ad Bin Sa'id Bin Zu'air remains in solitary confinement in al-Ha'ir prison. He has never been allowed **contact with** his father. Amnesty International believes that Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air's sons may also be prisoners of conscience, held for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression. They are the subject of Action File 113/0.

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

- expressing concern for Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air, whose health is reportedly deteriorating, and urging the authorities to grant him immediate access to adequate medical care;
- asking the authorities to ensure that Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air is allowed regular contact with, and visits from, his family;

- calling for Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air and his sons to be released immediately and unconditionally, as they appear to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin >Abdul >Aziz,
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 (it may be difficult to get through, please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Dr. >Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh
Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice
University Street,
Riyadh 11137, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 401 1741

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Royal Highness Prince Saud al-Faisal bin >Abdul >Aziz Al-Saud,
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Nasseriya Street,
Riyadh 11124, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 403 0159 (it may be difficult to get through, please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard

His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud
Royal Court, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

COPIES 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