

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

### **JORDANIAN MAN AT IMMEDIATE RISK OF EXECUTION**

Hussein Abo al-Kheir is at immediate risk of execution in Saudi Arabia as the authorities resume executions for drug-related offences after a two-year moratorium announced by the Saudi Arabian Human Rights Commission in January 2021. Since 10 November 2022, Saudi Arabia has executed 20 people convicted on drug-related charges. In 2014, Abo al-Kheir was arrested for alleged drug smuggling, and he was sentenced to death in 2015 following a grossly unfair trial. He has exhausted all legal appeals and will be put to death as soon as the King ratifies his sentence. During his pre-trial detention, Abo al-Kheir was subjected to an array of human rights violations, including incommunicado detention, lack of access to legal representation and torture to extract a "confession." Amnesty International calls on the King to not ratify Abo al-Kheir's death sentence, and the competent authorities to quash his conviction and re-try him in line with international fair trial standards.

Hussein Abo al-Kheir was arrested on 18 May 2014 by customs officials while crossing the Durra border from Jordan to Saudi Arabia for alleged drug smuggling. Upon arrest, he was held in incommunicado detention at an unknown location by the Durra counter-narcotics authority for a period of 12 days. He was only allowed to contact his family two weeks after his arrest.

During this period and throughout his pre-trial detention, Hussein Abo al-Kheir said that he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment to extract his "confession", including being suspended from his feet, and subjected to beatings and insults. Abo al-Kheir retracted his confession before the Tabuk Criminal Court on 15 December 2014 and again on 6 July 2017, stipulating that the authorities had tortured him into signing the "confession" with his fingerprint because he was beaten to the point that he could not hold a pen. Despite his request for a medical report before the court on 6 July 2017, his torture allegations were never investigated.

During his pre-trial detention and trial proceedings, Abo al-Kheir had no access to legal representation or consular assistance.

#### **Write to the King urging him to:**

- not ratify the death sentence of Hussein Abo al-Kheir
- quash his conviction and re-try him in proceedings that are fully consistent with international fair trial standards, without resort to the death penalty
- order a prompt, impartial, independent, and effective investigation into Abo al-Kheir's claims of torture and other ill-treatment
- declare an official moratorium on all executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty in Saudi Arabia.

#### **Write to:**

King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud

Office of His Majesty the King

Royal Court, Riyadh

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Phone: 011 966 111 488 2222

Fax: 011 961 11 403 3125 (please keep trying)

Twitter: @KingSalman

Salutation: Your Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud:

**And copy:**

Mr. Abdulaziz Mohammed H. Albadi

Chargé d'affaires

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**Additional Information**

The authorities have recently resumed a bloody spree in executions of individuals convicted for alleged drug-related offences. [Since 10 November 2022](#), the authorities have executed 20 individuals for alleged drug offences, 60% of whom are foreign nationals, including from Syria, Jordan, Nigeria and Pakistan. Since the beginning of 2022, the Saudi authorities have carried out 148 executions.

In January 2021, the [Saudi Human Rights Commission stated that](#) the country has enforced a moratorium on drug-related offences, and that “the Kingdom and its justice system are focusing more on rehabilitation and prevention.” Following this announcement, Saudi Arabia did not carry out any executions for drug-related offences until November 2022. Meanwhile, there was no official change to Saudi laws, including the Saudi Drugs and Narcotics Control Law which provides that drug smuggling or related crimes are punishable by death under *ta’zir* (the discretion of the judge). In June 2021, King Salman [issued royal directives](#) to the General Directorate of Prisons, ordering them to implement pardons procedures for some detainees held for drug offences. Although it was unclear whether this order would apply to those on death row, some detainees held within his facility were released. During his detention, Hussein Abo al-Kheir, who is a father of eight and the breadwinner of his family, received conflicting information about the status of his case. According to his family, they were informed by Abo al-Kheir in June 2021 that prison officials told him that his death sentence had been suspended and the sentence was being reviewed by the Ministry of Interior in light of the aforementioned royal directives. Despite the release of his fellow prisoners on death row at the time, Abo al-Kheir remained in detention.

In the absence of transparent information around judicial processes in Saudi Arabia, particularly in death penalty cases, families only find out about the fate of their loved ones through the media. Amnesty International’s assessment of the Supreme Court’s decision to uphold the conviction and death sentence of Hussein Abo al-Kheir indicates he will be at imminent risk of execution as soon as the King ratifies it, which could be at any moment, since families are not informed when the King ratifies death sentences at the final stage.