

Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca
Third UA: 14/24 Index: MDE 23/8012/2024 Saudi Arabia of May 6, 2024

SAUDI ARABIA

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST SENTENCED TO 11 YEARS FOR TWEETS

On April 14, 2024, Manahel al-Otaibi, a 29-year-old women's rights activist and fitness instructor, contacted her family from prison to report she was being held in solitary confinement with a broken leg. She stated the injury was due to a brutal beating in detention, and she had no access to medical care. Previously, Saudi authorities had forcibly disappeared her from November 5, 2023, until April 14, 2024. Earlier, on January 9, 2024, Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court had sentenced her to 11 years for "terrorist offences" in a secret trial. Her arrest on November 16, 2022, was for supporting women's rights through tweets and posting photos on Snapchat without an abaya.

Write to the Minister of Justice in Saudi Arabia urging him to:

- Order the immediate and unconditional release of Manahel al-Otaibi, as she has been convicted solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression.
- Pending her release, ensure she is granted immediate access to medical care, and her allegations of torture and other ill-treatment must be impartially investigated.

Write to:

Waleed Mohammed Al Smani
Minister of Justice
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Postal Code 11472, P.O.Box 7775
Email: minister-office@moj.gov.sa
Salutation: Your Excellency:

And copy:

Her Excellency Amal Yahya Almoalimi
Ambassador
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
201 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON K1N 1K6
Tel: (613) 237-4100 Fax: (613) 237-0567
Email: caemb@mofa.gov.sa

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Manahel al-Otaibi's case initially came before the Criminal Court in Riyadh, which on January 23, 2023, declared it lacked jurisdiction and referred the case to the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in Riyadh. The SCC often interprets provisions under anti-cybercrime and counter-terror laws to equate peaceful expression with "terrorism". Amnesty International has [documented how the SCC's judicial process is marred by human rights violations](#). Since 2018, numerous Saudi women's rights activists have been arbitrarily detained for advocating against the male guardianship system and for the right to drive.

These activists have reported sexual harassment, torture, and other ill-treatment during interrogation, with those released facing travel bans and expression restrictions.

Both of Manahel's sisters have also been charged in relation to their women's rights campaigning. In the same case, the Public Prosecutor accused Fawzia al-Otaibi of inciting Saudi girls to reject religious principles and rebel against Saudi customs via a hashtag promoting the end of male guardianship. A separate arrest order for Fawzia was noted in the court documents. Their other sister, Mariam, has been previously charged and detained for her activism and is currently under a travel ban.

In a related case, on January 25, 2023, the SCC resented Salma al-Shehab, a Leeds University PhD student and mother of two, to 27 years in prison, followed by a 27-year travel ban, for tweets supporting women's rights after a profoundly unfair trial.

As of January 2024, Amnesty International has documented 69 individuals prosecuted solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, including 32 for their social media posts. These individuals range from human rights defenders to poets and clerics. Amnesty International is aware that the actual number of such prosecutions is likely much higher.

Please take action as soon as possible until July 1, 2024! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.