

# URGENT ACTION

## SENTENCE OVERTURNED, BUT STILL IN PRISON

**Saudi Arabian human rights defender Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder, jailed for eight years in June 2013, has had his conviction and prison sentence overturned by the Court of Appeal, but is still behind bars.**

The Court of Appeal in al-Qassim overturned **Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder's** sentence on 6 January, and sent the case back to be heard by a new judge in the Criminal Court in Buraydah, in the central province of al-Qassim. The Court of Appeal ruled that the sentence had been handed down by a judge who was not impartial, and had a personal conflict with Dr al-Khoder. Despite this decision and al-Khoder's legal representative's repeated requests for him to be released pending his retrial, Dr al-Khoder remains in detention.

Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder's trial started in January 2013. On 10 April, he submitted a request to have the presiding judge removed from his case, but to no avail. Dr al-Khoder argued that the judge had publicly expressed negative opinions about him before the trial and was therefore not impartial. He was detained on the day of his fourth trial session, 24 April, when he refused to enter the courtroom after the judge arbitrarily denied women access to the court session. On 24 June 2013, he was convicted on several charges including "disobeying the ruler", "inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations", "harming the image of the state by disseminating false information to foreign groups" and "taking part in founding an unlicensed organization" and was sentenced to eight years in prison and a 10-year travel ban.

Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder, 48, is a founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and was professor of Comparative Jurisprudence at the Faculty of Islamic Jurisprudence at al-Qassim University until October 2011 when he was dismissed from his position, apparently because of his activism. He had been under a travel ban since 2010.

### **Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:**

■ Calling on the authorities to release Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 APRIL 2014 TO:**

#### King and Prime Minister

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 11 403 3125 (please keep trying)  
**Salutation: Your Majesty**

#### Minister of Justice

His Excellency Shaykh Dr Mohammed  
bin Abdulkareem Al-Issa  
Ministry of Justice  
University Street  
Riyadh 11137  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Fax: +966 11 401 1741  
+966 11 402 0311  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### **And copies to:**

#### Minister of the Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed  
bin Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud  
Ministry of the Interior, P.O. Box 2933,  
Airport Road, Riyadh 11134  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Fax: +966 11 403 3125 (please keep  
trying)

### **Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 167/13. Further information:

[/www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/022/2013/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/022/2013/en)

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities persecute human rights defenders with complete impunity, using both the courts and extrajudicial means such as the imposition of travel bans. Members of ACPRA have received the brunt of the authorities' repression. ACPRA, set up in October 2009, has reported on human rights violations and helped many families of detainees held without charge to bring cases against the Ministry of Interior before the Board of Grievances, an administrative court with jurisdiction to consider complaints against the state and its public services.

Two ACPRA co-founders, Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and Dr Mohammad al-Qahtani, were sentenced on 9 March 2013 to 10 and 11 years' imprisonment respectively, to be followed by travel bans of equal duration. They had been convicted of a list of offences among them "breaking allegiance to and disobeying the ruler", "questioning the integrity of officials", "seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations", "disseminating false information to foreign groups", "violating Article 6 of the information technology law" and "forming an unlicensed organization" (understood to be ACPRA) (see further information on UA 257/12, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/010/2013/en>). The court also ordered the disbanding of ACPRA, confiscation of its property and the closure of its social media accounts.

Another ACPRA member, 22-year-old Omar al-Sa'id, was sentenced on 12 December 2013 by a criminal court in Buraydah to four years in prison and 300 lashes. He was also handed a four-year travel ban to be enforced after he has served his sentence. His charges were similar to those faced by other ACPRA members (see public statement, *Released detained ACPRA activists* 19 December 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/036/2013/en>).

Fowzan al-Harbi, a founding member of ACPRA, was arrested on 26 December 2013 at the end of his second hearing before the Criminal Court in the capital, Riyadh. The judge ordered his arrest without providing any reason, despite repeated requests from al-Harbi's lawyer. He has been on trial since 4 December on similar charges related to his activism (see further information on UA 15/14, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/002/2014/en>).

Two other members of ACPRA, Issa al-Hamid and Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, have been summoned several times for questioning about their peaceful activism, by the General Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution. Issa al-Hamid (brother of Dr Abdullah al-Hamid) is being investigated for "stirring public opinion" and "founding and acting as president of an unlicensed organization". Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, another co-founder and current vice-president of ACPRA, has been under investigation since 11 May 2013, facing similar charges to his colleagues. It is feared that both men will soon be tried and imprisoned.

A number of other independent human rights groups and activists have also been harassed by the Saudi Arabian authorities. One prominent human rights defender, Waleed Abu al-Khair, the head of Saudi Arabian Monitor for Human Rights, had his three-month prison sentence for "ridiculing the Saudi Arabian judicial system" upheld by the Court of Appeal in Mecca on 6 February 2014. He is expected to begin his sentence shortly, while still facing another case before the Specialized Criminal Court on charges related to his peaceful activism. Six prominent reformists, including Dr Sulaiman al-Rashudi and Dr Saud al-Hashimi, began lengthy prison terms in late 2012 after they circulated a petition calling for political reform and discussed a proposal to establish an independent human rights organization (see UA 107/13, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/014/2013/en>).

Name: Dr Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khoder  
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 167/13 Index: MDE 23/005/2014 Issue Date: 7 March 2014