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Saudi Arabia must immediately release four detained women

The Saudi Arabian authorities must immediately release the four detained daughters of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud and allow them to move and travel freely, said Amnesty International today.

Earlier this year, two of the king's daughters, Sahar Al Saud and Jawaher Al Saud, aged 42 and 38 respectively, announced that they and their two other sisters, Hala Al Saud, 39, and Maha Al Saud, 41, had been prevented from moving freely for over 13 years. All four women have reportedly been detained in a padlocked and guarded villa within the grounds of the royal compound in Jeddah since 2001, and have been prohibited from leaving the compound and from travelling within Saudi Arabia or abroad.

One of the women has told Amnesty International that she and her sisters have been ill-treated by their guards and are denied adequate food. Amnesty International has also been told that Hala Al Saud and Maha Al Saud are being denied access to medical treatment for the illnesses from which they are said to be suffering.

Amnesty International's Secretary General, Salil Shetty, first raised the organization's concerns in a letter to King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in May 2014. The organization received no response and so wrote again to the Saudi Arabian authorities on 20 October raising concerns about the reported deterioration in the women's detention conditions and health. Over a month later, the Saudi Arabian authorities have yet to even acknowledge receiving these concerns.

The continued detention of the four women is contrary to Article 3 and Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which uphold the right to liberty and prohibit arbitrary detention. It is also contrary to Article 14 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which specifies: "Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, search or detention without a legal warrant."

Furthermore, the restrictions on the four women violate their right to freedom of movement, which requires that states refrain from arbitrary denial of an individual's exercise of free movement, and prevent such interference by third parties. Article 13 of the UDHR, states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state" and that "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country". Similarly, according to Article 26(1) of the Arab Charter, to which Saudi Arabia is a party, "Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State party shall, within that territory, have the right to freedom of movement and to freely choose his residence in any part of that territory in conformity with the laws in force". Article 27(1) goes

on to specify that “No one may be arbitrarily or unlawfully prevented from leaving any country, including his own, nor prohibited from residing, or compelled to reside, in any part of that country”. Under Article 15 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Saudi Arabia ratified in 2001, state parties must accord to women equality before the law “relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile”.

Amnesty International reiterates its call to the Saudi Arabian authorities, and in particular to King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, to ensure that the four women are released and to safeguard their freedom of movement and their right to leave the country, if they wish. The organization also urges that they be granted immediate access to appropriate medical treatment and adequate food.