

# URGENT ACTION

## HARSHER SENTENCE AGAINST SHI'A CLERIC UPHELD

**An eight-year prison sentence of prominent Saudi Arabian Shi'a cleric has been upheld upon appeal. Sheikh Tawfiq al-'Amr is jailed for criticizing discrimination against Shi'a in Saudi Arabia and calling for reforms.**

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr's sentence was upheld by the appeal division of the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) on 6 January. He was sentenced by the SCC on 13 August to eight years in prison, to be followed by a 10-year ban on overseas travel and delivering religious sermons and public speeches. The court had found him guilty of inciting sectarianism, defaming the country's ruling system, ridiculing the mentality of its religious leaders, calling for change and disobeying the ruler.

The SCC had sentenced Sheikh Tawfiq al-'Amr, on 17 December 2012, to three years' imprisonment, followed by a five-year travel ban, but the Court's Appeal judge sent the case back recommending a harsher sentence. The cleric had been expected to be released on 1 December 2012 but refused to sign a pledge that, among other things, forbade him from delivering religious sermons, including during Friday prayers.

The charges against Sheikh Tawfiq al-'Amr stemmed from his criticism of discrimination against Saudi Arabian Shi'a and his calls for reforms in the country. He appears to have been convicted for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

Sheikh Tawfiq al-'Amr was arrested in the evening of 3 August 2011, and held incommunicado for a week, in solitary confinement. He has been detained since then in several prisons where his family has had limited access to him. He had also been arrested on 27 February 2011, two days after a sermon he gave calling for reforms in Saudi Arabia. He was released without charge on 6 March, after a week of being detained incommunicado.

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

- Expressing concern that Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr has been convicted for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and calling on them to release him immediately in connection with these charges;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to his family and lawyer.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 MARCH 2015 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 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)  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

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

#### Minister of Justice

His Excellency Sheikh 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

### **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 third update of UA 242/11. Further information:  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/019/2014/en>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr has been arrested and detained on numerous occasions over the past six years. In 2008, he was arrested apparently in connection with an art exhibition he had organized for the Shi'a festival of Ashura, and detained for about three days. He was arrested again a year later, seemingly in connection with his practice of certain aspects of the Shi'a faith, and detained for about 10 days. Some time after his release he was brought before a court accused of incitement against the government. The trial was adjourned to allow the prosecution time to provide evidence to substantiate the claim. Nothing is known to have happened with the case until he was rearrested in August 2011. For more information on Sheikh Tawfiq al-'Amr's detention in February and March 2011 see UA 58/10 and update ([www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/004/2011](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/004/2011) and [www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/006/2011](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/006/2011)).

Sources close to Sheikh Tawfiq al-'Amr have told Amnesty International that the cleric has suffered from torture and other ill-treatment during different periods of his detention since his arrest in August 2011. The cleric spent the first week of his detention incommunicado and in solitary confinement. Since then he has been moved to several prisons where his family has had limited access to him. According to these sources, whom Amnesty International cannot name for security reasons, Sheikh Tawfiq al-'Amr has been beaten by security guards in al-Malaz prison in Riyadh. At one point, he was moved to a section of the prison where religious radicals of the Sunni Muslim faith are held, and subsequently suffered from threats and physical abuse. The prison authorities then moved him to a solitary cell and only provided him with light clothing and no blankets, despite being in a very cold cell.

Saudi Arabians in the Kingdom's predominantly Shi'a Eastern Province have been calling for reforms since February 2011. Demonstrations have been organized to protest at the arrest, imprisonment and harassment of members of the Shi'a community for holding collective prayer meetings, celebrating Shi'a religious festivals and for breaching restrictions on building Shi'a mosques and religious schools.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have responded with repressive measures against those suspected of taking part in or supporting protests or expressing views critical of the state. Protesters have been held without charge and incommunicado for days or weeks at a time, and some are reported to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated. At least 20 people connected with protests in the Eastern Province have been killed since 2011 and hundreds have been imprisoned. In May and June 2014, at least five Shi'a activists detained in connection with the 2011 and 2012 protests were sentenced to death on trumped-up charges related to their activism. Others have also received harsh sentences ranging from eight to 25 years in prison. One of those five, Ali al-Nimr, was 17 at the time of his arrest and was tortured to make him confess. He is the nephew of prominent Saudi Arabian Shi'a cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr.

Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, the Imam of the al-Awamiyya mosque in al-Qatif, eastern Saudi Arabia, was sentenced to death by the SCC in Riyadh, on 15 October 2014 after a deeply flawed trial and for a list of vaguely worded offences such as "disobeying and breaking allegiance to the ruler", "calling to overthrow the regime", "calling for demonstrations", "inciting sectarian strife", "questioning the integrity of the judiciary", "meeting with and supporting wanted suspects", and "interfering in a neighbouring state's affairs" (in reference to Bahrain). He was arrested after being shot by security officers in July 2012 (for more information see UA 271/14 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/028/2014/en>).

Name: Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr  
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 242/11 Index: MDE 23/006/2015 Issue Date: 21 January 2015

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