

**SAUDI ARABIA'S  
'DAY OF RAGE':  
ONE YEAR ON**

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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# INTRODUCTION

One year on from a planned "Day of Rage" demonstration in the capital, Riyadh, on 11 March 2011, the Saudi Arabian authorities continue to detain at least six individuals arrested on or in the lead-up to that date.

The most well known of the six is Khaled al-Johani, a 40-year-old teacher who was the only protester to reach the designated location of the demonstration and was arrested by security forces on 11 March 2011 minutes after speaking to international media. He is now standing trial on charges relating to his presence at the location of a demonstration and for harming the reputation of Saudi Arabia. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Another, Muhammad al-Wad'ani, a 25-year-old teacher, had been arrested a week earlier, on 4 March 2011, during a rally in Riyadh aimed at building momentum for the "Day of Rage". Amnesty International does not know whether he has been charged, but believes he is likely to be a prisoner of conscience.

Amnesty International has recently obtained information regarding the identities and continued detention of another four individuals arrested on 11 March 2011: Fadhel Nimr Ayed al-Shammari, Bandar Muhammad al-Utaybi, Thamer Nawaf al-Enzi and a man believed to be called Ahmed al-Abdul Aziz. While the organization has fewer details on their cases, it believes they are also likely to be held in connection with the planned "Day of Rage".

Regarding the five detainees other than Khaled al-Johani, Amnesty International has learnt that at least two of them are being held without charge and is concerned that the other three are in the same situation. At least one of the detainees has alleged that he was subjected to torture or other ill-treatment during a period of incommunicado detention following his arrest.

Amnesty International gathered information on the cases of Khaled al-Johani and Muhammad al-Wad'ani last year, issuing an initial assessment on them in a report published in December 2011.<sup>1</sup> It has since conducted interviews by telephone and Skype with sources inside Saudi Arabia with knowledge of each of the six cases.<sup>2</sup> Despite repeated requests to visit Saudi Arabia, the organization is not allowed access to the country.

Amnesty International sent a memorandum to the Saudi Arabian authorities on 26 August 2011, in which it raised concerns about the cases of Khaled al-Johani and Muhammad al-Wad'ani and requested information about the reasons for their arrest and their legal status, as well about the identity of other protesters arrested. It wrote again on 29 February 2012 to raise concerns about the continuing detention of the five individuals arrested on 11 March 2011 and to ask whether any had been

charged. The organization has not received a substantive response to either communication.

The continuing detention of these individuals arrested a year ago in Riyadh comes in a context in which hundreds of others have been arrested in recent months for protesting or voicing their opposition to government policies, many in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, where most of the country's Shi'a minority lives. Most have been released without charge; others remain in detention without charge or trial; and others still have been charged with vague security-related and other offences.<sup>3</sup> Others who protested or attempted to protest in Saudi Arabia in previous year also remain in detention.<sup>4</sup>

## DEMONSTRATIONS STIFLED

In early 2011 an unknown group of Saudi Arabian activists created a page on Facebook called "the people want to overthrow the regime".<sup>5</sup> The group called for an elected Shura Council (the present one is a consultative body appointed by the King), a fully independent judiciary, the release of all political prisoners, the exercise of freedom of expression and assembly, the abolition of all duties and taxes, and a minimum wage. As in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa that have witnessed protests over recent months, social media has played a key role in enabling the dissemination of calls for demonstrations.

One of the six men who continue to be detained to this day, Muhammad al-Wad'ani, posted videos on YouTube<sup>6</sup> calling for three protests to be held. The first was dubbed the "Friday of Gathering" and announced as due to take place on 4 March 2011 outside the al-Rajihi Mosque in Riyadh and aimed at building momentum for what was planned to be the major demonstration on 11 March 2011. The second, described as the "Monday of Loyalty to the Detainees", was due to be held on 7 March 2011 to demand the release of political detainees held without charge or trial. The third, to be held on 11 March 2011 in the al-'Ulaya district of Riyadh, was supposed to be the most important and known by two names, the "Day of Rage" and the "Revolution of Hunain", the latter in reference to a battle that took place during Prophet Muhammad's lifetime and ended with a decisive victory for the early community of Muslims. In the videos, he also called for the overthrow of the monarchy.

The Saudi Arabian authorities reacted in a manner consistent with their general lack of tolerance of peaceful activities by its opponents. On 5 March 2011, the Ministry of Interior re-issued a long-standing ban on all demonstrations in the country, with state television quoting the Ministry as saying that security forces would use all measures to prevent any attempt to disrupt public order. The Ministry of Interior reportedly said that demonstrations violated Islamic law and the Kingdom's traditions.<sup>7</sup>

A day later, the highest religious governmental body reportedly issued a statement saying: “The Council of Senior Clerics [Ulema] affirms that demonstrations are forbidden in this country. The correct way in sharia [Islamic law] of realising common interest is by advising, which is what the Prophet Muhammad established.

“Reform and advice should not be via demonstrations and ways that provoke strife and division, this is what the religious scholars of this country in the past and now have forbidden and warned against.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition, government-run media described those calling for demonstrations as serving foreign agendas.

Ahead of the planned “Day of Rage”, Saudi Arabia’s religious leaders, the Shura Council and religious police instructed people not to join it and some media reports suggested that some 10,000 soldiers were to be deployed to stop the protests.<sup>9</sup>

Protest organizers had agreed via social media that the gathering place for the demonstration would be the Diwan al-Mazalem building in the al-‘Ulaya district of Riyadh and, in response, on the day the Saudi Arabian authorities surrounded the designated location with checkpoints and security vehicles, enabling them to take control of every entry point into the area. Along one section of the main al-‘Ulaya Road, of around 1km in length, at least four checkpoints, each manned with around seven security personnel, as well as numerous police vehicles parked around 50 metres apart, were seen by witnesses to whom Amnesty International spoke.<sup>10</sup> Other security personnel and vehicles were stationed in smaller streets off the main roads.

Security personnel wearing olive and khaki uniforms and armed with rifles and clubs directed the traffic away from the roads and streets leading to the designated location of the demonstration and sometimes asked drivers and passers-by for their IDs, arresting those suspected of being potential protesters. Witnesses told Amnesty International that the security personnel belonged to, among other forces, the Security Special Forces, in charge of maintaining stability in the Kingdom, and the Interior Ministry’s General Directorate of Investigation (GDI), the main internal security force responsible for arresting and detaining people in the name of security.

## ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

On 11 March 2011 and during the preceding days, security forces reportedly arrested dozens of people they suspected of being involved in organizing the planned protests in Riyadh or of trying to participate in the “Day of Rage” demonstration. One activist who spoke to Amnesty International on condition of anonymity described having been at the periphery of the planned location of the

demonstration on 11 March and seeing a vehicle belonging to the security forces parked in a street with around 20 men inside who had apparently been taken into custody. Most of those arrested during those days were, it seems, released soon afterwards. Amnesty International has information about six individuals arrested at this time who continue to be held, but does not know if any others arrested remain in detention or not.

Khaled al-Johani was the only protester to reach the designated location of the "Day of Rage" demonstration and was arrested by security forces minutes after giving an interview to the BBC Arabic television channel in which he criticized the lack of freedoms in the Kingdom.<sup>11</sup> He has five children whose ages range between six months – a baby born while he was in detention – and 12 years. He is believed to have been held at first in 'Ulaysha prison and placed in solitary confinement there for two months. He was then transferred to al-Ha'ir prison, where he was allowed visits from his family. He is said to have been offered a state-appointed lawyer but refused this asking for a lawyer of his own choosing, a request he was initially denied.

Khaled al-Johani was brought to trial on 22 February 2012 before the Specialized Criminal Court, a tribunal set up in 2008 to try detainees held on terrorism-related charges. At the hearing, the General Prosecutor read out the list of charges against him; they included supporting demonstrations, being present at the location of a demonstration and communication with foreign media in a manner that harmed the reputation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The court adjourned his case until April and allowed him to appoint a lawyer for the first time, over 11 months after he was arrested.

Muhammad al-Wad'ani was arrested during the rally on 4 March 2011 apparently by plain-clothed security personnel. Footage uploaded onto YouTube shows the back of a man believed to be him carrying a sign apparently carrying the logo of "Youth of 4 March" as he stood amid a crowd.<sup>12</sup> In the video a group of around five men wearing traditional Saudi Arabian white robes are seen to surround him and lead him away. Within moments, he reappears in the crowd and raises the sign up again, apparently having escaped those who had apprehended him. However, the same group of men are seen capturing him again and then manhandling him as they take him away. No warrant appears to be shown by any of those performing the arrest

Following his arrest, a delegation from the al-Dawasra tribe, to which he belongs, visited King Abdullah, pledged their allegiance to him and declared that Muhammad al-Wad'ani had been repudiated by the tribe.<sup>13</sup> Muhammad al-Wad'ani is reportedly detained in al-Ha'ir prison. Amnesty International does not know whether he has been charged or whether he is able to receive visitors.

Four other individuals arrested on 11 March 2011 remain in detention: Fadhel Nimr Ayed al-Shammari, Bandar Muhammad al-Utaybi, Thamer Nawaf al-Enzi and a man believed to be called Ahmed al-Abdul Aziz.

One of the four was standing with a friend near al-Habib Hospital in the al-'Ulaya district when they were reportedly approached by men wearing traditional white robes and asked to which security branch they belonged. After realizing that the two were not members of the security forces, the questioners apparently led them to a car in which two men who had already been taken into custody were sitting. All four reportedly had their hands cuffed and were taken to a police station. While his friend was released in the following days, he was taken to another security facility in the al-Deera district in Riyadh. He continues to be held to this day, apparently because the security forces realized that he had a brother who had been held for years as a political detainee. He was reportedly accused by those questioning him of going to the al-'Ulaya district with the intention of demonstrating to demand the release of his brother. Three weeks later, he was reportedly transferred to al-Malaz jail in Riyadh and has since been detained there without charge.

Another reportedly went to the al-'Ulaya district with the intention of taking part in the planned demonstration on 11 March 2011 but was approached by plain-clothed men who reportedly knew him by name and asked him to go with them. He was reportedly accused by security officers during his questioning of taking part in organizing a demonstration and of opposing the country's rulers. He was reportedly transferred to al-Malaz jail and has since been detained there without charge.

A third was reportedly picked up by security personnel as he left a bookshop near al-'Ulaya Road. He is also believed to be held in al-Malaz jail, as is the fourth person.

## TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Amnesty International has detailed information indicating that at least one detainee currently held in al-Malaz jail was subjected to torture or other ill-treatment during the early stages of his detention. He was reportedly verbally abused, slapped in the face, occasionally hit with a baton and had his face and hair gripped and pulled by interrogators while detained at the Ministry of Interior for a week. Subsequently, he was detained at a GDI facility, where he was reportedly deprived of sleep for three successive days by being splashed with water every time he fell asleep. In addition, apparently, his hands were tied to an iron bar for up to eight hours at a time, during which he was unable to sit down, and he was subjected to beatings.

This detainee has also apparently been denied medical treatment. A prison doctor reportedly advised some three months ago that he should be transferred to a hospital to have damage to his spine, possibly caused by the beatings, examined and treated by a specialist, but to date this has not happened.

Torture and other ill-treatment in Saudi Arabia's pre-trial detention facilities are common, partly because interrogators know that they can commit such abuses



without fear of punishment. The abuse is also encouraged by the ready acceptance by courts of “confessions” forced out of detainees. Amnesty International is therefore concerned that others among the detainees arrested on or in the lead-up to 11 March 2011 may have been subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, particularly when they were held incommunicado in the early period of their detention.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International is concerned about the continuing detention of all six individuals. It considers Khaled al-Johani to be a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and assembly and the charges against him to be inconsistent with international human rights standards. It believes that Muhammad al-Wad'ani is likely to be a prisoner of conscience for the same reasons.

Amnesty International has fewer details on the cases of Fadhel Nimr Ayed al-Shammari, Bandar Muhammad al-Utaybi, Thamer Nawaf al-Enzi and a man believed to be called Ahmed al-Abdul Aziz, but they also appear to have been arrested in connection with the planned “Day of Rage” demonstration in Riyadh on 11 March 2011. Amnesty International knows of no information indicating that they committed or advocated violence at that time and believes they may be prisoners of conscience, too.

Amnesty International, therefore, urges the Saudi Arabian authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Khaled al-Johani and all other detainees held solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. Other detainees should be released unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence and promptly tried in proceedings that fully adhere to international fair trial standards;
- Drop the charges against Khaled al-Johani;
- Ensure that, in the meantime, all six detainees are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to family and a lawyer of their choice;
- Provide medical attention to all detainees who may need it, including by transferring them to hospitals outside prison when specialist care is required;

- Open a full, independent and impartial investigation into the reports of torture and other ill-treatment and ensure that anyone found to be responsible is brought to justice.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International report, *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security* (Index: MDE 23/016/2011), December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Telephone and Skype interviews were conducted most recently on 20, 22, 28 and 29 February and 2 March 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security*.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Khaled al-'Omaid and Mohammed al-'Oteibi have been detained since 2009 for protesting or attempting to demonstrate against Israel's military action in Gaza in 2008-2009. For more information, see: Amnesty International, *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security*.

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security*.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad al-Wad'ani's video can be viewed on YouTube, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOeqTN2bRa8>, last accessed on 8 March 2012

<sup>7</sup> "Saudi Arabia says won't tolerate protests", Reuters, 5 March 2011, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/05/us-saudi-protests-idUSTRE72419N20110305>, last accessed on 8 March 2012.

<sup>8</sup> "Saudi clerics condemn protests and 'deviant' ideas", Reuters, 6 March 2011, at <http://af.reuters.com/article/energyOilNews/idAFLDE7250E020110306>

<sup>9</sup> "Saudis mobilise thousands of troops to quell growing revolt", *The Independent*, 5 March 2011, at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudis-mobilise-thousands-of-troops-to-quell-growing-revolt-2232928.html>, last accessed on 8 March 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Skype and telephone interviews conducted by Amnesty International on 28 February and 2 March 2012 with a Saudi Arabian activist and two would-be protesters.

<sup>11</sup> Khaled al-Johani's interview with BBC Arabic on 11 March 2011 can be viewed on YouTube, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxinAxWxXo8>, last accessed on 8 March 2012.

<sup>12</sup> The arrest of the man believed to be Muhammad al-Wad'ani can be viewed on YouTube, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JV1GR5Kyhnc&feature=related>, last accessed on 8 March 2012.

<sup>13</sup> The repudiation of Muhammad al-Wad'ani by his tribe can be viewed at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M\\_gG2ob6N7s&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_gG2ob6N7s&feature=related), last accessed on 8 March 2012.



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