

URGENT ACTION

WOMEN ACTIVISTS' SENTENCES CONFIRMED

An appeal court in Dammam has confirmed the sentences of two women's rights activists convicted in an unfair trial for attempting to help an abused woman. Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Oyouni were sentenced to 10 months in prison followed by a two-year travel ban.

On 24 September 2013, an appeal court in the city of Dammam confirmed the 15 June conviction of two prominent Saudi Arabian women's rights activists by the criminal court in the city of al-Khobar and upheld their sentences of 10 months in prison followed by a two-year travel ban. The activists were convicted of the Shari'a offence of *takhhbib* (inciting a woman to defy her husband's authority), specifically inciting a Canadian woman to separate from her Saudi Arabian husband.

Wajeha al-Huwaider and **Fawzia al-Oyouni** were arrested on 6 June 2011 when attempting to come to the aid of the Canadian woman, after they received a text message from her telling them that her husband had left her and her children were locked in the house with no food whilst he travelled for five days. On their way to the house, the two activists were ambushed by security forces, accompanied by the husband, and arrested. Although the husband did not file a lawsuit against them, the prosecution accused them of attempting to kidnap the woman and her children and take them to the Canadian embassy.

Their trial before the criminal court in al-Khobar was marred by a number of irregularities. After the two activists requested that the woman they were accused of kidnapping testify in court, the judge replaced the charge of kidnapping by *takhhbib*. The judge denied their request to call her as a witness and proceeded to convict and sentence them even though the alleged victim herself had appeared on social media denying the allegations against the two activists. *Takhhbib* is not a recognizable criminal offence under international standards. Both women were prevented from foreign travel before their sentences were finalized and are due to begin serving their sentences immediately.

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

- Calling on the authorities to quash the convictions and the sentences imposed on Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Oyouni as they have been convicted solely for their legitimate activities as women's rights activists and ensure that they are not deprived of their liberty or subjected to arbitrary restrictions on their freedom of movement;
- Asking them to immediately end the judicial and extrajudicial harassment and persecution of human rights activists in Saudi Arabia.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 NOVEMBER 2013 TO:

King of Saudi Arabia
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 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 Royal Highness

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi Arabian authorities have recently unleashed a widespread campaign of persecution of human rights activists, both through the courts and through arbitrary measures. The authorities have either sentenced or imprisoned, or both, over a dozen prominent activists on similar charges such as disobeying the ruler, ridiculing a state institution or a public figure, calling for demonstrations, and for harming the image of the state by communicating with outside parties that are typically either media or human rights organizations. With minor exceptions, most of these trials and imprisonments have received little media attention and have been met by almost complete silence from the international community.

Silence, however, has not necessarily been the reaction towards recent, more positive developments in Saudi Arabia's human rights situation, particularly in the area of women's rights. When in August the Saudi Arabian authorities issued a law criminalizing domestic abuse, there was extensive media coverage of the congratulations given by the international community but little focus on the numerous issues with the law, not to mention the ongoing widespread crackdown on human rights activism in the country in general. Although the text of the law and the fact that it was issued can be considered progress, its implementation is, however, far from certain. For one thing, there are currently no competent authorities that can deal with domestic abuse in Saudi Arabia. For another, other laws and customs in the country severely discriminate against women making it almost impossible for them to access redress or state institutions without a male guardian.

Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Oyouni were both sentenced at their original trial two months before the "domestic abuse" law was issued. Their case had been frozen, but it was reactivated a year after the incident in question without any explanation. Three appeal court judges approved and finalized the sentence on 24 September 2013 – roughly one month after the domestic abuse law had been issued and entered into force.

Although Saudi Arabia has ratified only a limited number of international documents, it is a party to the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It has, however, raised two reservations to the Convention. In particular, the Saudi Arabian authorities declared that "[i]n the case of contradiction between any term of the Convention and the norms of Islamic law, the Kingdom is not under obligation to observe the contradictory terms of the Convention."

Name: Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Oyouni

Gender m/f: f

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