

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/saudi-arabia-raif-badawi-s-detention-is-an-29-05-2015,47946.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Saudi Arabia

News conference

“Raif Badawi’s detention is an insult to intelligence and freedom”

29 May 2015

Ensaf Haidar, the wife of imprisoned Saudi blogger and website creator Raif Badawi, called for his release at a news conference organized yesterday in Paris by Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International.

Now residing in Canada with her three children, Ensaf Haidar is currently on a European tour to draw public attention to her husband’s plight and to seek the support of European governments.

She would not stop fighting for the release of her husband, who is unjustly detained by the Saudi authorities, Haidar said. Held since 2012, Badawi was sentenced in May 2014 to ten years in prison, 1,000 lashes and a fine of 1 million rials (200,000 euros) on a charge of insulting Islam.

“My husband never thought he was doing wrong, he just spoke freely and differently and now he is in prison, unjustly convicted,” Haidar said. *“With just a few days to go before the start of Ramadan, a small window of hope is opening, because the king usually pardons prisoners of conscience at this time.”*

“Meanwhile, I will continue to campaign, to ask the government officials I meet to contact their Saudi counterparts in order to talk about Raif. I am not trying to put pressure on Riyadh, I am just drawing attention to a humanitarian case, that of my husband, who has always preached peace and freedom and who is now badly missed by his family.”

As the creator of the *Liberal Saudi Network*, a website now banned in Saudi Arabia, Badawi was awarded the Reporters Without Borders press freedom prize in the “Netizen” category in 2014.

He was publicly subjected to a first session of 50 lashes in January 2015 but subsequent sessions of this barbaric punishment have been postponed – officially on health grounds. According to his wife, he could be retried by the supreme court on a charge of apostasy, which carries the death penalty.

“Raif Badawi embodies freedom of the spirit and the spirit of freedom,” Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

“His detention is an insult to intelligence and liberty. We ask the Saudi authorities to put a complete stop to the flogging and simply overturn his conviction. We also urge France and all other countries concerned about human rights to react officially to this iniquitous sentence and to ask the Saudi authorities to release this young blogger.”

In a [petition](#) that has gathered nearly 46,000 signatures since December 2014, Reporters Without Borders is calling on the Saudi authorities to pardon Badawi.

In a joint initiative with its national sections and foreign bureaux, Reporters Without Borders has also written to heads of state and government urging them to intercede with the Saudi authorities on behalf of Badawi. The recipients include US President Barack Obama, French President François Hollande and Spanish Premier Mariano Rajoy.

The Saudi authorities tolerate no independent media outlets and have been steadily tightening their grip on the Internet since the Arab spring in 2011. Online information is closely controlled and the regime does not hesitate to use security grounds and a draconian cyber-crime law to jail bloggers.

Two journalists and six netizens are currently detained for questioning the regime or for posting

information regarded as critical or as damaging to the Kingdom's security or reputation.

Some have been mistreated or even [tortured](#). They include Badawi's lawyer, **Waleed Abu Al-Khair**, who founded the Saudi Observatory for Human Rights. He was [sentenced](#) to 15 years in prison in July 2014 over the information he was posting online.

Wajdi Al-Ghazzawi, the owner of *Al-Fajr TV* and host of a programme called "Al-Fadfada," was [sentenced](#) to 12 years in prison in February 2014 for accusing Saudi Arabia of links with terrorism and Al-Qaeda in particular. He was also banned from leaving the country for 20 years after completing his jail sentence and from ever appearing on television again.

Saudi Arabia is ranked 164th out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).
