

URGENT ACTION

SHI'A CLERIC JAILED AFTER CALLING FOR REFORMS

A prominent Saudi Arabian Shi'a cleric has been sentenced to eight years in prison and banned from delivering religious sermons, for criticizing discrimination against Shi'a in Saudi Arabia and calling for reforms.

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr was sentenced 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, by the Specialized Criminal Court. The court 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 same court 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 Jaber Ibrahim 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 solely 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 detained incommunicado.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English 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 25 SEPTEMBER 2014 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 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
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

President, Human Rights Commission
Bandar Mohammed 'Abdullah al-Aiban
Human Rights Commission
PO Box 58889, Riyadh 11515
King Fahad Road
Building No.373, Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 11 4612061
Email: hrc@haq-ksa.org

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 second update of UA 242/11. Further information:

<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/017/2013/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Inspired in part by protests that swept the Middle East and North Africa region, 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. Of those whose cases have moved to the courts, many have been charged solely for participating in demonstrations.

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, then aged 52, was arrested at a checkpoint in July 2012. The exact circumstances of his arrest are unclear. The Ministry of Interior announced that Sheikh Nimr had been arrested as an "instigator of sedition" and was shot at as "he and those with him resisted security forces at a check-point, opened fire at security forces and crashed into a car belonging to security forces as he sought to escape". However, his family said he was not armed, did not own a gun and was on his own at the time of his arrest. On 25 March 2013, Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr's case was sent to the Specialized Criminal Court where the prosecution accused him among other things of *haraba* or banditry, which carries the death penalty. His court sessions are currently underway.

Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr has also 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 Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr's detention in February and March 2011 see UA 58/10 and update (www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/004/2011 and www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde23/006/2011).

Name: Sheikh Tawfiq Jaber Ibrahim al-'Amr

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 242/11 Index: MDE 23/019/2014 Issue Date: 14 August 2014