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Second UA: 74/22 Index: MDE 23/6643/2023 Saudi Arabia of April 03, 2023

SAUDI ARABIA RELEASE WOMAN SENTENCED TO 27 YEARS FOR TWEETS

On January 25, 2023, the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, resentedenced Salma al- Shehab to 27 years in prison. Salma, a Leeds University PhD student and mother of two, was also given a 27-year travel ban after the Supreme Court returned her case to the SCC's appeals chamber to look into it again. The SCC convicted Salma al- Shehab of terrorism-related offences for publishing tweets in support of women's rights.

The Saudi authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Salma al-Shehab and quash her conviction and sentence.

Write to the Saudi Minister of Justice urging him to:

- Order the immediate and unconditional release of Salma al-Shehab and the quashing of her conviction and sentence as she is being held solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression.
- Desist from equating the exercise of freedom of expression with "terrorism"
- Repeal or substantially amend the counter-terrorism and anti-cybercrime laws which criminalize peaceful dissent, and enact new laws that are fully compatible with international human rights standards.

Write to:

Waleed Mohammed Al Smani
Minister of Justice
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Postal Code 11472, P.O. Box 7775
Email: minister-office@moj.gov.sa
Salutation: *Your Excellency,*

And copy:

Mr. Abdulaziz Mohammed H. ALBADI
Chargé d'affaires
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
201 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON K1N 1K6
Tel: (613) 237-4100 Fax: (613) 237-0567
Email: caemb@mofa.gov.sa

***We encourage you to also copy Mohammed Bin Salman Al Saud, Prime Minister and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, and the de facto ruler of the country. He could be reached at: admin@cpc.gov.sa

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Saudi authorities targeted Salma al-Shehab for using Twitter to follow, write about and support women's rights activists. One of the activists Salma supported is Loujain al-Hathloul, who was jailed in 2018 after a grossly unfair trial before the SCC for "spying with foreign parties" and "conspiring against the kingdom." She was released in February 2021.

In 2022, Amnesty International [documented](#) the cases of 15 people who were sentenced to prison terms of between ten and 45 years for peaceful online activities, including the longest sentence believed to ever be imposed on a Saudi woman for peaceful online expression. Saudi Arabia also infiltrated at least one social media company to unlawfully obtain information on dissidents and control the information that is disseminated about the Kingdom online. All 15 individuals were prosecuted by the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) which was originally set up to try terrorism cases. The SCC has used vague provisions under the anti-cybercrime and terrorism laws which equate peaceful expression and online activity with "terrorism" to prosecute these individuals.

Amnesty International has documented how [every stage of the SCC judicial process](#) is tainted by human rights violations. These individuals were subjected to a range of human rights violations during their detention, including being held incommunicado and in solitary confinement, often for months at a time, and denied access to a lawyer throughout their pre-trial detention. Some of them were also subjected to arbitrary travel bans, in contravention of international human rights law.

The crackdown on online expression is only one tool of the Saudi authorities to repress dissent. As of March 2023, Amnesty has documented the cases of 67 individuals who had been prosecuted for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including human rights defenders, peaceful political activists, journalists, poets, and clerics. Of those, 32 were prosecuted for peacefully expressing their opinions on social media. Amnesty International is aware that the real number of such prosecutions is likely much higher.

***** Please take action at your earliest convenience!**