

# August 2021 report: The human rights situation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



The Saudi regime ignores all calls to halt the human rights injustices taking place in the country and continues to violate rights and pursues a policy of repression and abuse against activists demanding freedoms. This paper in conjunction with several international human rights reports aims to highlight the numerous examples of brutality practised by the government against its people. The following is a summary of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia for August 2021.



# CONTINUING ARRESTS



The Saudi regime continues its approach of arbitrary arrests, raids, and enforced disappearances without the minimum standards of criminal and legal procedures.

Press sources revealed the Saudi authority had carried out a massive campaign of arrests against military personnel on charges of loyalty to former Crown Prince Muhammad bin Nayef. The sources stated the new campaign of arrests affected mostly military personnel, elements in the Ministry of Interior, soldiers, and army officers.

Sources stress the campaign of arrests comes as the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (otherwise known as MBS) considers certain elements of the armed forces to be under the influence of bin Nayef, a deemed scenario with political implications potentially manifesting itself as an internal coup against MBS.





The Saudi security forces also arrested the social media activist Abdullah bin Awad Al-Mubarak at his home in Yanbu in late July 2021.

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Al-Mubarak was arrested for highlighting and expressing views on human rights violations on various social media platforms – a move that was deemed negative by the state and therefore confirming the authority's continued battle against freedom of opinion and expression.

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As is the case with the scores of detainees, the state has practised a policy of suppressing information related to the arrests of the activists. The authorities have refrained from providing their families with any knowledge related to their status and the conditions of their imprisonment.



# JUDICIARY AND JUDGMENTS



It has been observed the legal system and ‘independent’ courts in Saudi Arabia lack the basic legal standards. For example, they do not permit the appointment of legal representation for detainees, along with public hearings not being authorised. Observers have deemed this as a clear indictment, accusing the state of issuing presumptions, arbitrary and unfair rulings against the accused without clear and sound evidence.

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A Saudi court issued a four-year prison sentence against a Sudanese journalist Ahmed Ali Abdulqader on charges of insulting state institutions and speaking negatively about the Kingdom's policy.

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Abdulqader has been accused of posting tweets on his Twitter account, praising the Sudanese revolution in 2018 and criticising the policy of Sudan and Saudi Arabia in Yemen.





The journalist was arbitrarily arrested by the security forces on 19th April 2020 upon his arrival at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah. He was detained by state police for 20 days before being transferred to Al-Shumaisi Prison in Makkah.

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SANAD sources can confirm Mr Abdulqader was physically tortured, denied legal representation (in the form of a lawyer) and barred from communicating with his family.

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Michael Page, Deputy Middle East Director at Human Rights Watch said, “Imprisoning a journalist on fabricated charges shows the negativity of Saudi Arabia’s policies more clearly than anything Ahmed Ali Abdulqader has published.”





The Specialised Criminal Court in Riyadh issued verdicts against Palestinian detainees on Sunday 8th August 2021. According to the human rights organisation, SANAD, the sentences issued by the court reached a maximum sentence of 22 years imprisonment, whilst the shortest term was three years.

The detainees sentenced to arbitrary sentences were: Dr Hani Muhammad Al-Khudari for three years, Dr Muhammad al-Khudari for 15 years, Muhammad al-Abed for 22 years, Muhammad al-Banna for 20 years, Ayman al-Arian for 19 years, Muhammad Abu al-Rub for 18 years, Sherif Nasrallah for 16 years, Jamal al-Dahoudi for 15 years and Omar Arif al-Hajj for 12 years.

The Specialised Court in Riyadh held a group trial session against 69 detainees of Palestinian and Jordanian nationalities, including 10 Saudi citizens. This example of arbitrary rulings confirms the regime stands against freedom of opinion and expression and opposes supporters of the Palestinian cause. Observers have commented these violations of human rights expose the Saudi state to even more international condemnation.





Human rights organisation, SANAD, has reported that the Saudi judiciary recently issued rulings against the sons of the detained doctor Safar Al-Hawali and his brother Saad Allah.

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According to a relative of Dr Safar Al-Hawali, the judiciary issued a sentence against his sons to four years in prison, calculated from the beginning of the arrest date. He stressed the rulings came against each of the children of Dr Safar including Abdulrahman, Abdullah and Abdulrahim, in addition to his brother Saad Allah Al-Hawali and his office manager Dr Ismail Hassan.

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Sheikh Safar Al-Hawali and his three sons have been arbitrarily detained in state prison since 12th July 2018 - three days after the leaking of his book 'Muslims and Western Civilisation' in which he advised the Saudi ruler and criticised their policies.





Confidential sources informed human rights organisation SANAD that on Tuesday 17th August, the Court of Appeal postponed the hearing, which was scheduled to be held to respond to the accusations and sentences against the activist detainee Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan.

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The session was scheduled to be held on 13th September 2021, but the court brought the session forward at the beginning of the week to be scheduled for the 17th August 2021. However, it returned and was postponed on the morning of the session without providing reasons or setting a new date.

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This hearing comes after the judiciary sentenced Mr Sadhan to 20 years in prison - followed by a 20-year travel ban - on charges related to his peaceful expressions highlighting the human rights situation in the country.





The Court of Appeal increased the arbitrary sentence issued against the human rights activist Khaled Al-Omair from seven years to nine and placed a travel ban for the same duration. Al-Omair is accused of several charges, most notably: launching a hashtag demanding a new constitution for the country, deliberately inciting public opinion and inciting against the rulers.

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The authorities have increased the prison sentence of the detained activist Mohammed Abdullah Al-Otaibi by an additional three years brings the total sentence to 17 years. The government detained Al-Otaibi on charges of travelling to Qatar in 2017. The trial which commenced at the Specialised Criminal Court is said to have lacked the most basic standards of legal representation and therefore justice.

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By issuing these rulings, the judiciary has ignored the resolution issued by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which called for the immediate release of Al-Otaibi. He was detained on 24th May 2017 at Hamad International Airport in Doha by Qatari security forces and forcibly deported to Saudi Arabia on the 28th of the same month.



# PRISON VIOLATIONS



Human rights activist Dr Muhammad Fahad Al-Qahtani went on a hunger strike inside his cell, due to ill-treatment and poor prison conditions. He was prevented from communicating with his family and deprived of his books for nearly a year, as was confirmed by his wife Maha Al-Qahtani on her Twitter account.

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Al-Qahtani, a professor of economics and a human rights activist and one of the founding members of the Assembly for Civil and Political Rights in Saudi Arabia – ACPRA, was sentenced arbitrarily on the 9th March 2013 to a 10-year prison sentence and a travel ban, after dubious charges against him relating to human rights activities.

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Abdulqader has been accused of posting tweets on his Twitter account, praising the Sudanese revolution in 2018 and criticising the policy of Sudan and Saudi Arabia in Yemen.





SANAD is also aware of other detainees entering an open hunger strike in Saudi prisons in solidarity with Dr Muhammad Al-Qahtani and in protest against the ill-treatment and violations they are subjected to inside prisons.

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The prison wing at Al-Ha'ir penitentiary in Riyadh where ACPRA activists are being held was exposed to a fire incident that resulted in suffocation injuries amongst the detainees. The fire and resulting smoke have affected the following detainees at the prison: Dr Fahd Al-Qahtani, Abdulaziz Al-Sunaidi, Issa Al-Nukhaifi and others. SANAD sources explained the fire was caused by psychiatric patients being held in the same wing – a penitentiary practice that is deemed to be non-conventional and high risk.

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Sources for SANAD inside Saudi Arabia reported the death of the detainee Khaled Omar Bahakim inside Dhahban prison as a result of wilful medical negligence.





Bahakim, who was arrested in 2009 was of poor health and suffered kidney failure inside prison. His arrest came shortly after he underwent a kidney transplant. Authorities and care specialists are accused of denying him appropriate medicines.

Bahakim was subjected to terrible violations and severe psychological and physical torture methods, as reported by eyewitnesses from inside Dhahban prison. He was sentenced to 19 years in prison in a show trial that lacked the basic legal procedures.

SANAD has been reliably informed by sources that the activist Khaled Al-Omair was subject to an assassination attempt inside prison. The attempt to take his life was made by one of the prisoners who had no connection with the activist or previous knowledge of his whereabouts.

A detainee at Al-Ha'ir prison was denied access to attend the funeral of his son. Dr Hassan Farhan Al-Maliki son passed away, however, the administration deemed it appropriate to deny Al-Maliki the freedom to pray for his deceased child. These systemic restrictions and repressive methods are used to put pressure on 'prisoners of conscience' by torturing them psychologically.



# MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE



Medical neglect has become one of the deadliest tools that many prisoners of conscience face in government prisons, especially those with chronic diseases.

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Abdullah Al-Hawali is an example of one detainee who is suffering from serious health conditions. He has only one kidney and suffers from health complications as a result of neglect in prison. Recently, Mr Al-Hawali's health deteriorated significantly, and yet the authorities are still delaying his transfer to the hospital for the necessary tests.

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According to one of his relatives, "The Saudi judiciary issued a ruling against him and his two brothers who were detained with him, for four years, counted from the beginning of the arrest date."



# PLEAS



Amnesty International called on the Riyadh government to hold accountable those involved in violations and crimes of torture against detainees in prisons. The organisation said, “The Saudi authorities must ensure that those responsible for torture and other ill-treatment of detainees are brought to justice and that they are not subjected to any other punitive measures such as a travel ban.”

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Heba Morayef, Director of the Middle East and North Africa for Amnesty International said the Saudi government is using the Specialised Criminal Court to create a false aura of legitimacy around its misuse of the anti-terrorism laws to silence its critics.

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It seems the authorities are turning a blind eye to those involved in the crimes of torture against male and female detainees in prisons. These inactions are further examples of the impunity that is prevalent in Saudi Arabia – a country that pays flagrant regard to violations of human rights and freedoms.





Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) warned against carrying out the arbitrary death sentence of detainee Abdullah Al-Huwaiti. The organisation highlighted Al-Huwaiti's death sentence was a result of a crime that occurred when he was a minor at the age of 14

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The Tabuk Court issued a death sentence against Al-Huwaiti in October 2019, also ordering him to pay \$350,000 in compensation to the victims. He was charged with participating in a robbery that led to the death of a soldier. However, it must be noted Al-Huwaiti was a legal minor at the time of the incident.

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The organisation stressed the accusations against Al-Huwaiti lack sufficient tangible evidence. The authorities are also being accused of extracting information from Al-Huwaiti using torture and coercion.



Amnesty International has started a campaign on its website calling on the families of detainees and activists to move for the release of detainees in Saudi prisons.

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In a report published on its website titled, 'Release Imprisoned Activists', the organisation accused the Saudi authorities of legitimising human rights violations in the country through the Specialised Criminal Court.

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Amnesty International called on activists to sign a petition calling for the release of prisoners of conscience to pressure the government to support the detainees.

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The human rights organisation added, the authorities should release all innocent prisoners unconditionally, especially since their detention was for reasons related to freedom of opinion and expression.

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The report suggested, the government exploited all resources to work on polishing its image abroad, and invested millions of dollars in public relations, in the hope of attracting foreign investments to the country. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, there was a systemic campaign of lies and a clear campaign and crackdown on anti-authoritarian government speech.

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# EXECUTIONS



The Saudi authorities continue to implement arbitrary death sentences issued by the judiciary based on confessions extracted under duress, or according to vague interpretations of some provisions of the law, in line with the aspirations or desires of decision-makers in the government.

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Between January 1st - 3rd August 2021, the government has executed at least 42 detainees, whilst another 41 detainees remain under the threat of the death sentence – this includes at least 5 minors (under the age of 16). Despite the government's promises to reduce the number of executions and the decline in the rates during the past year, the authorities continue to implement death sentences against detainees.

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At the beginning of 2021, Amnesty International confirmed Saudi Arabia (along with three other Middle Eastern states) had implemented the most executions - indicating Riyadh and other countries having a "cruel and frightening determination" to kill people, despite Covid 19 pandemic crisis facing mankind.





On the 3rd August 2021, the Saudi authority implemented the death sentence against the detainee Ahmed Al-Janabi. It is understood the ruling issued by the Saudi judiciary against Al-Janabi was based on accusations that did not meet the threshold for the death penalty. An official statement issued by the Ministry of Interior stated Al-Janabi did not face charges of murder or bloodshed, but rather a number of his charges were related to protesting.





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Mustafa Al-Khayat, who was detained recently is awaiting the implementation of the unjust death sentence against him. Currently, there is no information about his condition inside the prison

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The young Al-Khayyat faces the fate of the minor Mustafa Al Darwish, who was recently executed on charges that were not major and were not deserving of execution even by the standards of the Saudi judicial system.

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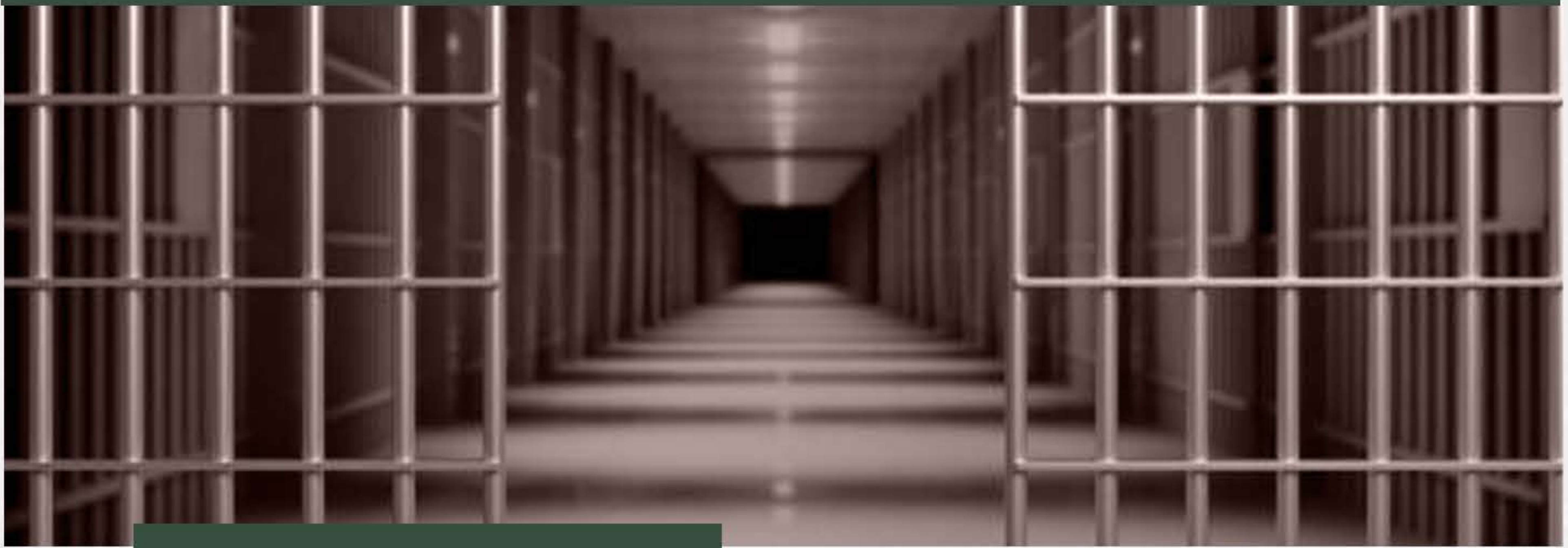
Due to Mr Al-Khayat's case having been transferred to the Presidency of State Security, the state now can refrain from revealing or disclosing any information about the condition of the detainee inside the prison.

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SANAD say the Saudi government must respect international laws, retract its arbitrary rule, and reveal the fate of the detainee Mustafa al-Khayat.



# RELEASES



According to sources and information received by SANAD, Dr Khaled Al-Ajimi has now been released from prison after years of arbitrary detention that affected him along with several other preachers and activists. He was arrested in September 2017, but according to sources, Dr Al-Ajimi is still banned from travelling and practising the humanitarian work/activities he was involved with previously.

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SANAD has also received information confirming the release of social and media activist Hassan Al-Qarni, after 16 months of arbitrary detention. Al-Qarni was subjected to arbitrary arrest in April 2020 because he expressed an opinion regarding the measures imposed by the authority to confront the Covid crisis.

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The detained young man was subjected to many violations during his detention, including insults and being prevented from communicating with his relatives for long periods, and keeping his condition in prison a secret for several months. Mr Al-Qarni is still affected by the measures placed on him by the state as he is prevented from travelling and writing.





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