



# **SANAD Organization Monitors the Arrests of Imams and Qur'an Reciters in Saudi Arabia**



The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is witnessing a noticeable escalation in the pace of arbitrary arrests and human rights violations, where the security authorities have launched a number of arrest campaigns at close intervals, targeting many religious, cultural, and academic figures, including a number of Qurʾan reciters and mosque imams.

The escalation in the rate of arrests is accompanied by a series of violations they suffer in prisons, including torture, harsh detention conditions, and deprivation of their most basic human rights, such as: access to appropriate medical care, communication with their families, and a fair trial.

This human rights report aims to monitor and highlight the situation of arbitrary arrests faced by imams and Qurʾan reciters in Saudi Arabia, documenting the violations they are subjected to inside prisons. This effort is part of the Sanad Organization's endeavor to ensure respect for human rights, including the freedom of religion and belief, and the freedom of opinion and expression.





## Dr. Saleh Al Talib

Saleh Al Talib is an Imam and preacher at the Grand Mosque, and he also served as a judge in the Special Criminal Court. He is renowned for his melodious voice in reciting the Holy Qur'an and his impactful sermons characterized by moderation and centrality. He has held prominent positions in serving the Qur'an and the community.



### Arrest

In August 2018, the Saudi authorities arrested Dr. Al Talib at a Saudi airport while he was returning from a foreign vacation. His arrest was conducted in a demeaning manner in front of his wife and children, due to a Friday sermon in which he criticized certain aspects of corruption in society, which was considered to be a critique of the Entertainment Authority.

### Violations

In prison, Dr. Saleh Al Talib faced numerous violations, starting with his enforced disappearance for a month immediately after his arrest, followed by poor treatment by the prison guards, and restrictions on many of his basic rights, including communication with his family. He was also denied the right to appoint a lawyer, leading to his trial being conducted in secrecy.



## Trial

In early 2022, the Special Criminal Court acquitted Dr. Saleh Al Talib. However, the Appeals Court overturned the acquittal and issued another sentence imprisoning him for 10 years. Subsequently, the Supreme Court deemed this sentence insufficient, raising serious concerns about the possibility of it being increased.



## Dr. Abdullah Basfar

Abdullah Basfar is an Imam and preacher at the Mansour Al-Shuaibi Mosque in Jeddah. He holds a Ph.D. in Fiqh and its Principles and has devoted his life to serving the Holy Qur'an, becoming famous for his melodious voice and moving recitations. He has numerous Quranic recordings broadcasted on various radio and television channels as well as online platforms.

His contributions were not limited to recitation alone; he also served as an Associate Professor in the Sharia and Islamic Studies Department at King Abdulaziz University and worked as the Secretary-General of the International Association of the Book and the Sunnah, leaving a positive impact in the service of the Quran, religion, and science.

## Arrest

In August 2020, the Saudi authorities arrested Dr. Abdullah Basfar following the circulation of an old video clip of him leading prayers at the Ayasofya Mosque square in Turkey. He had received an invitation from a Turkish association in 2016, but after the Saudi-Turkish relationship crisis following the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, his visit was used as a pretext for his arrest.

## Trial

On October 12, 2022, the Special Criminal Court in Riyadh sentenced Dr. Abdullah Basfar to 12 years in prison, after a secret trial that lacked the most basic standards of justice, where he was even denied the right to appoint a lawyer.





# Amer Al-Muhallal

Amer Al-Muhallal is one of the most prominent Qur'an reciters in Saudi Arabia, having served as an Imam for several mosques in the country, including the King Faisal Mosque in Jeddah, Zaid Al-Khair Mosque, Abdul Qadir Faqih Mosque, Bin Sand Al-Ghamdi Mosque, and ultimately before his arrest, as an Imam for the Khadija bint Khuwaylid Mosque. His contributions were not limited to Imamship; he also worked as a teacher and supervisor for memorization circles affiliated with the Jeddah Memorization Association, and he had no political or human rights activities whatsoever.

## Arrest

In October 2020, the Saudi authorities arrested the reciter Amer Al-Muhallal, based on his management of social media platforms belonging to Dr. Abdullah Basfar, who was also arrested since August 2020.

## Violations

Despite the long period since his arrest, the Saudi authorities have neither released him nor initiated a trial to this day. Moreover, he suffers from a severe deterioration in his physical and mental health, with the Saudi authorities refusing to provide the necessary healthcare.





# Abdulmajid Al-Arkani

Abdulmajid Al-Arkani is one of the reciters with Burmese origins, who had served as an Imam in several mosques across Arab countries.

## Arrest

The reciter Abdulmajid Al-Arkani, who recited verses from the Qur'an at the opening of a conference held by the Muslim World League in Saudi Arabia attended by the Turkish academic and writer Yasin Aktay, did not realize that this would lead to his arrest. Yasin was impressed by his recitation, invited him over, exchanged greetings, and they swapped contact information. Al-Arkani was shocked to find himself arrested on charges of communicating with Yasin, stating that their interaction was limited to exchanging greetings and Eid congratulations after their meeting. Despite Al-Arkani's arrest in 2020, his detention was not disclosed until later in the same year.

## Violations

Al-Arkani was detained in one of the most brutal prisons in Saudi Arabia - Shaar Prison - where he was subjected to prolonged solitary confinement and severe beatings.

## Trial

The Special Criminal Court sentenced Al-Arkani to 5 years in prison, which was later reduced to two and a half years. However, as the end of his sentence approached, the Appeals Court increased his sentence to 10 years.



## Conclusion

None of the detained reciters had any political activities, nor is there any legal justification for the detention of any of them. This makes their arrest arbitrary, in addition to being subjected to severe torture without any regard for human rights. Long-term sentences were issued against them resulting from unfair trials they faced.





# **SANAD Organization Monitors the Arrests of Imams and Qur'an Reciters in Saudi Arabia**

