

Joint Press Release

SAUDI ARABIA: Seven human rights organisations refer the case of lawyer Waleed Abu Al-Khair to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Paris-Geneva-Vancouver-Toronto-New York-Amsterdam-London, April 15, 2015. *On the first anniversary of the detention of lawyer Waleed Abu Al-Khair, Lawyers Rights Watch Canada, Lawyers for Lawyers (the Netherlands), the Law Society of England and Wales (U.K.), the Law Society of Upper Canada, the International Federation for Human Rights- FIDH (France) and the World Organization Against Torture - OMCT (Belgium, Switzerland) and the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (U.S.) have filed a complaint to the United Nations (UN) Working group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD).*

Mr. **Waleed Abu Al-Khair** is a human rights lawyer, Founder and Director of the Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (MHRSA). The application to register the organisation as a human rights NGO was rejected. Mr. Abu Al-Khair also acted as lawyer of the prominent human rights defender **Raif Badawi**. In 2012, he was awarded the Olof Palme Prize for human rights for his “strong, self-sacrificing and sustained struggle to promote respect for human and civil rights for both men and women in Saudi Arabia”.

He was arrested on April 15, 2014 while appearing at the fifth session of his trial before the Specialized Criminal Court, which deals with terrorism cases, in Riyadh. On February 15, 2015, the Specialized Criminal Court of Appeal in Riyadh confirmed a sentence of 15 years in prison, a travel ban of equal duration following imprisonment, and a fine of SR 200,000 (approximately EUR 46,957). The charges against him are “striving to overthrow the state and the authority of the King”, “criticising and insulting the judiciary”, “assembling international organisations against the Kingdom”, “creating and supervising an unlicensed organisation”, and “contributing to the establishment of another” and “preparing and storing information that will affect public security”.

“We reiterate our strong condemnation of the ongoing arbitrary detention of Waleed Abu Al-Khair on terrorism charges, which was staged by the authorities to punish him for peaceful human rights activities and in violation of the rights recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We ask the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to confirm the arbitrariness of the detention and require his immediate and unconditional release. No lawyer should suffer prosecution for legitimate activities undertaken in the course of representing a client or advocating for the promotion and protection of human rights”, said our organisations today.

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