

URGENT ACTION

SAUDI WOMAN IMPRISONED FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS TWEETS

On November 16, 2022, Saudi authorities arrested 29-year-old Manahel al-Otaibi. She has been forcibly disappeared since November 2023. She was charged with violating the AntiCyber Crime Law due to her tweets in support of women's rights as well as posting photos of herself at the mall without an abaya (a traditional loose-fitting long-sleeved robe) on Snapchat. Her case has been referred from the Criminal Court in Riyadh to the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), set up to try terrorism-related crimes. The SCC is notorious for carrying out grossly unfair trials and handing out harsh sentences, including the death penalty, for individuals peacefully expressing themselves online. Saudi authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Manahel al-Otaibi and drop the charges against her.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Urgent Action 14.24**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

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

Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the United States
Her Royal Highness Princess Reema bint Bandar bin
Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
601 New Hampshire Ave
NW, Washington, DC 20037
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Your Excellency,

I am writing to express concerns regarding Saudi authorities have enforced disappearance of Manahel al-Otaibi, who has not seen since November 2023. In November 2022, Manahel was detained and awaiting trial on charges of violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law for tweeting in support of women's rights and posting photos on Snapchat of herself at the mall wearing "immodest" clothing. Shortly before her family lost contact with her, she told them that she was beaten by a fellow prisoner.

According to court documents reviewed by Amnesty International, Manahel al-Otaibi was charged with "publishing and spreading content that contains committing public sins and inciting individuals and girls in society to renounce religious principles and social values and to violate public order and public morals on her Twitter account". The charges against her are based on her social media posts which were "opposed to regulations and laws that relate to women", including through calling to #EndMaleGuardianship. The prosecutor also referred to reports from 2018 and 2019 by the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, also known as the religious police, who accused her of tarnishing the reputation of the Kingdom and going to the mall without wearing an abaya, promoting the removal of the hijab, and posting photos of that outing on Snapchat.

I urge you to order the immediate and unconditional release of Manahel al-Otaibi, as she is being held solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression. Meanwhile, the authorities must reveal her whereabouts to her family.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In March 2018, almost five years prior to **Manahel al-Otaibi's** arrest, Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman stated in a television interview that “women wear decent, respectful clothing, like men ... This, however, does not particularly specify a black abaya or a black head cover. The decision is entirely left for women to decide what type of decent and respectful attire she chooses to wear.”

Manahel al-Otaibi's case was first heard by the Criminal Court in Riyadh. On January 23, 2023, the Criminal Court ruled that it had no jurisdiction to try this case and referred the case to the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in the capital, Riyadh. The SCC has routinely used vague provisions under the anti-cybercrime and counter-terror laws equating peaceful expression with “terrorism”. Amnesty International has documented how every stage of the SCC judicial process is tainted by human rights violations.

Both of Manahel al-Otaibi's sisters have also faced charges related to their campaigning for women's rights. In the same case against Manahel submitted by the public prosecution to the Riyadh Criminal Court, the Public Prosecutor accused her sister, **Fawzia**, of leading “a propaganda campaign to incite Saudi girls to denounce religious principles and rebel against customs and traditions in the Saudi culture” and using a hashtag “which promotes liberation and the fall of male guardianship”. The court document, reviewed by Amnesty International, states that a separate order would be issued for Fawzia's arrest. Their other sister, **Mariam**, a prominent campaigner against male guardianship in the Kingdom, has previously been charged and detained for her women's rights activism and is currently under travel ban.

In a similar case to Manahel al-Otaibi's, on January 25, 2023, the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) resentedenced **Salma al- Shehab**, a Leeds University PhD student and mother of two, to 27 years in prison, followed by a 27-year travel ban upon appeal. The SCC convicted Salma al-Shehab of terrorism-related offenses after a grossly unfair trial for publishing tweets in support of women's rights.

As of mid-2021, nearly all human rights defenders, women's rights activists, independent journalists, writers, and activists in the country had been arbitrarily detained, put through prolonged and unfair trials – most often by the SCC – or released under conditions that include travel bans and other arbitrary restrictions to their fundamental rights, such as to conduct peaceful activism.

As of January 2024, Amnesty International has documented the cases of 69 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.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Arabic, or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: April 11, 2024

NAME AND PRONOUN: Manahel al-Otaibi (she/her)