

URGENT ACTION

MANAHEL AL-OTAIBI SENTENCED TO 11 YEARS IN PRISON

On January 9, 2024, Saudi Arabia's infamous Specialized Criminal Court sentenced Manahel al-Otaibi, a 29-year-old fitness instructor and women's rights activist, to 11 years in prison for "terrorist offenses" in a secret trial. She was arrested on November 16, 2022 and charged with violating the Anti-Cyber 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. Saudi authorities forcibly disappeared Manahel al-Otaibi between November 5, 2023 and April 14, 2024. On April 14, 2024, she contacted her family and told them she was being held in solitary confinement in al-Malaz Prison with a broken leg after being brutally beaten in detention, and without access to medical care.

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 **Third 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 Smani
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
Email: Info.was@mofa.gov.sa

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concerned that the Specialized Criminal Court in Saudi Arabia has sentenced 29-year-old fitness instructor and women's rights activist, **Manahel al-Otaibi**, to 11 years in prison on "terrorist offenses" after a secret trial. The decision was only revealed weeks later in the Saudi government's formal reply to a request for information in a Joint Communication by UN Special Rapporteurs about her case.

Manahel al-Otaibi was arrested on November 16, 2022 and charged with violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law for tweeting hashtags in support of women's rights and posting photos on Snapchat of herself at the mall wearing "immodest" clothing. On April 14, 2024, after a period more than five months of enforced disappearance, Manahel al-Otaibi called her family to inform them that she is being held in solitary confinement in al-Malaz Prison with a broken leg after being brutally beaten, and without access to medical care.

I urge you to order the immediate and unconditional release of Manahel al-Otaibi, as she has been convicted solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression. Pending her release, she must be granted immediate access to medical care, and her allegations of torture and other ill-treatment must be impartially investigated.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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. Since 2018, Saudi authorities have arbitrarily detained Saudi women’s rights activists who campaigned for the end of the male guardianship system and the right to drive in Saudi Arabia. Women’s rights activists [reported](#) facing sexual harassment, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment during interrogation. Those released are under travel bans and face restrictions on their freedom of expression.

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 al-Otaibi 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.

Nearly all human rights defenders, women’s rights activists, independent journalists, writers, and activists in the country have been arbitrarily detained, put through prolonged and unfair trials – most often by the SCC – or released but 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 solely 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: July 1, 2024

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

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/7977/2024/en/>