

URGENT ACTION

MANAHEL AL-OTAIBI SUBJECTED TO TORTURE IN SAUDI PRISON

After one month of incommunicado detention, Manahel al-Otaibi contacted her family on September 1, 2024, and told them she was again being held in solitary confinement and brutally beaten by fellow prisoners and prison guards. On January 9, 2024, Saudi Arabia's infamous Specialized Criminal Court sentenced Manahel al-Otaibi, a 30-year-old fitness instructor and women's rights activist, to 11 years in prison for "terrorist offences" 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 had forcibly disappeared Manahel al-Otaibi between November 5, 2023 and April 14, 2024.

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 **Fourth 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

CC: 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
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Dear Minister of Justice,

I am distressed to learn that 30-year-old fitness instructor and women's rights activist, **Manahel al-Otaibi**, is being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in al-Malaz Prison. After a one-month period of renewed incommunicado detention, Manahel al-Otaibi was able to contact her family, and she alleged she had been held in solitary confinement for a full month and subject to beatings by prison guards and fellow prisoners.

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.

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 notorious terrorism court, 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 al-Otaibi 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 al-Otaibi's arrest. Their other sister Mariam al-Otaibi, 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: March 6, 2025

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

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/urgent-action-manahel-al-otaibi-sentenced-to-11-years-in-saudi-arabia-14-24/>