



H. E. Ambassador Václav Bálek  
President of the UN Human Rights Council  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

[ohchr-registry@un.org](mailto:ohchr-registry@un.org)

Your Excellency,

I am writing to urge your intervention to help prevent the execution of a prominent Saudi Arabian reformer and academic, Awad al-Qarni at the hands of the regime in Riyadh, and secure the release of two women jailed for their online support of freedom campaigners.

Al-Qarni, now 65, has been imprisoned since 2017 during a campaign of political repression that critics dub "the Great Purge", which began when Prince Mohammed Bin Salman was inaugurated as crown prince.

He was sentenced to death in January for tweets that he had made advocating political reforms in the tightly ruled kingdom. His son Nasser is currently in exile in the UK after being forced to flee the country for his own safety.

The possibility of Prof Al-Qarni being executed is very real. In 2022 Saudi Arabia executed 147 people including 81 people in just one day.

His sentencing comes a year after another Saudi citizen, Salma al-Shehab was sentenced to 34 years for tweeting in support of activists calling for reform. The 34-year-old mother of two was returning from Leeds to see her family whilst on a break from her studies Leeds University. She was originally given a three-year sentence, but this was later extended to 34 years, despite no new convictions being made. She was guilty of retweeting tweets opposing the imprisonment of Loujain al-Hathloul, a prominent feminist in the kingdom.

Also in 2022, Noura al-Qahtani, a 50-year-old mother of five was jailed for 45 years, partly for sending tweets, which according to the Saudi authorities were "spreading lies". Qahtani had followed and retweeted from accounts which were critical towards Prince Mohammed and the arrests of some detainees within the kingdom. She was also convicted of owning a banned book written by popular reformist cleric Salman al-Ouda (the book in question was not in fact one of his political books, rather it was a self-help book) who is also imprisoned, and of insulting state symbols. Once again, despite being originally sentenced to 13 years, she then had her sentence lengthened to 45 years despite no new charges or evidence being presented.

The arrest and punishment of people for merely expressing or supporting expressions of non-violent political views stands in direct opposition to the values of freedom of expression that the UN charter upholds. As you will know, in 2020 Saudi Arabia lost its seat on the United Nations Human Rights

Islamic Human Rights Commission  
202 Preston Road, Wembley, London, United Kingdom, HA9 8PA  
Tel: (+44) 20 8904 4222  
E-mail: [info@ihrc.org](mailto:info@ihrc.org) Web: [www.ihrc.org](http://www.ihrc.org)

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Council, the body which describes itself as being tasked with “promoting and protecting all human rights around the globe.” This reflects the country's slide into authoritarianism and political repression under King Salman.

I urge you to write to the authorities in Saudi Arabia demanding they release the prisoners mentioned above, abide by international laws and conventions guaranteeing freedom of expression and desist from further persecuting people for expressing their political views online or anywhere else.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' shape with a horizontal line underneath it.

Massoud Shadjareh  
Chair, Islamic Human Rights Commission