

Advocacy dossier

Loujain al-Hathloul

لجين الهذلول

At liberty **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi women's rights defender held in detention from May 2018 to February 2021 and now under an indefinite travel ban.

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The case at a glance

Saudi women's rights defender held in detention from May 2018 to February 2021 and now under an indefinite travel ban.

Status	Arrested	Country
At liberty	**15 May 2018**	**Saudi Arabia**

Sentence 5 years 8 months (Specialised Criminal Court, 28 Dec 2020), with 2 years 10 months suspended and time served credited; 3 years of probation; travel ban, which continued after its court term ended.

Charges Communicating with foreign embassies and journalists
Applying for jobs at the UN
Promoting women's rights in violation of "public order"

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Immediately end all harassment, summons, surveillance, and threats against the family of Loujain al-Hathloul in Saudi Arabia.

02 Cease the use of family members as leverage to pressure Loujain al-Hathloul into silence.

03 Drop any fabricated charges against family members and unblock their travel, financial, and professional rights.

04 Comply with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which explicitly prohibits reprisals against the families of defenders.

05 Immediately lift the travel ban imposed on Loujain al-Hathloul and on any family members affected by the same order.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Denial of legal counsel International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)

Gender based violence Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 35 Convention against Torture, Article 1

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

Reprisal against relatives UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Torture Convention against Torture, Articles 1, 2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 7

Travel ban International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 12

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

How the case unfolded

1 December 2014

Arrest

Arrested for driving into Saudi Arabia

Loujain al-Hathloul was arrested for defying the ban on women driving when she tried to drive into Saudi Arabia from the UAE. She was held at the Al-Ahsa women's facility.

12 February 2015

Release

Released after 2014 detention

She was released from the Al-Ahsa facility.

June 2017

Release

Released days after airport detention

She was released a few days after her detention at Dammam airport. The exact date was not reported.

4 June 2017

Arrest

Detained at Dammam airport

Security forces detained her at King Fahd International Airport in Dammam on her arrival from the United States, and moved her to Riyadh the next day.

March 2018

Release

Released and placed under a travel ban

After a few days she was released and placed under a travel ban.

12 March 2018

Arrest

Seized in Abu Dhabi and returned to Saudi Arabia

She was seized in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, and forcibly returned to Saudi Arabia, where she was held for a few days.

May 2018

Solitary confinement imposed

Held incommunicado

For the first three months after her arrest she was held incommunicado. She reported torture and sexual harassment during pre-trial detention and was held in solitary confinement.

15 May 2018

Arrest

Arrested in Saudi sweep of women's-rights defenders

She was arrested at her home in Riyadh in a coordinated sweep of women's rights defenders, weeks before the driving ban was officially lifted.

13 March 2019

Hearing

First court session

Her first court session was held after ten months in detention without charge.

October 2020

Hunger strike begins

Begins a second hunger strike in detention

She began a two-week hunger strike, her second since her arrest in 2018.

10 December 2020

Referral to trial

Case moved to the Specialised Criminal Court

The Specialised Criminal Court opened her case after her trial before the ordinary criminal court had been suspended for more than a year and a half.

28 December 2020

Conviction

Sentenced to 5 years 8 months

The Specialised Criminal Court convicted her under counter-terrorism legislation; portions of the sentence were suspended.

10 February 2021

Conditional release

Conditionally released

She was released on three years of probation and under a court-ordered travel ban.

10 March 2021

Final judgment

Appeal court upholds verdict

The appeal court upheld her conviction, sentence, probation and travel ban.

13 November 2023

Other act

Court-ordered travel ban term ends, but she remains unable to travel

The originally imposed travel ban term ended on this date by the court order.

December 2023

Complaint filed

Files a court complaint against State Security over the travel ban

She filed a judicial complaint against the Presidency of State Security, challenging the travel ban that kept her in the country after its court-ordered term had ended and asking for it to be lifted.

February 2024

Travel ban imposed

Told she is under indefinite travel ban

Attempting to travel abroad, al-Hathloul was informed at the border that she remained under a permanent travel ban with no expiry date.

March 2024

Other act

UN experts ask Saudi Arabia for the legal basis of her travel ban

A group of UN experts wrote to the Saudi authorities asking on what legal grounds travel bans had been imposed on her and on the activist Maryam al-Otaibi.

13 May 2024

Context

Rights groups call for lifting of travel ban

ALQST and partner organisations renewed their call for the lifting of her travel ban, which they describe as illegal. They said her parents have been under a travel ban since her arrest.

10 September 2024

Case closed or dropped

Board of Grievances closes her travel ban complaint

When her complaint came before the Board of Grievances, State Security said it had not received the case documents; the judge declared himself incompetent and closed the case for lack of jurisdiction. In October 2024 she was preparing an appeal.

16 July 2025

Other act

ALQST says her travel ban remains unofficial and open-ended

In a briefing on travel bans against released prisoners of conscience, ALQST said the ban on her was applied unofficially with no stated duration, and that relatives still in Saudi Arabia are also barred from travelling.

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The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked against current sources. Al-Hathloul has been out of prison since 10 February 2021, but she remains unable to leave Saudi Arabia: her court complaint against the ban was closed by the Board of Grievances in September 2024 for lack of jurisdiction, and in July 2025 ALQST said the ban was still being applied unofficially with no stated duration. Samar Badawi, arrested in the same 2018 crackdown on women's rights defenders, was released in 2021 under travel restrictions of her own.

Background and work

Loujain al-Hathloul is one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent women's-rights defenders. She rose to international visibility through her campaigning against the kingdom's ban on women driving and her sustained advocacy for the abolition of the male-guardianship system that subordinated adult women to male relatives across nearly every dimension of public life.

Arrest and detention

She had been detained before: for 73 days from December 2014 after trying to drive into Saudi Arabia from the UAE, for a few days in June 2017 at Dammam airport, and in March 2018, when she was seized in Abu Dhabi, returned to Saudi Arabia and placed under a travel ban.

On 15 May 2018, at her home in Riyadh and weeks before the driving ban was officially lifted, Saudi authorities arrested al-Hathloul along with a cohort of women's-rights advocates in a sweep widely interpreted as a deliberate signal that activism, not reform, would not be tolerated. She spent nearly three years in detention, held incommunicado for the first three months. During pre-trial detention she reported being tortured, sexually harassed, and held in solitary confinement.

Conviction and release

On 28 December 2020 the Specialised Criminal Court sentenced her to five years and eight months in prison under counter-terrorism legislation, with two years and ten months suspended. She was conditionally released on 10 February 2021, on three years of probation and under a court-ordered travel ban. On 10 March 2021 the appeal court upheld the verdict.

Post-release: an indefinite travel ban

The court-imposed travel ban officially expired on 13 November 2023. In February 2024, when al-Hathloul attempted to leave Saudi Arabia, border officials informed her she remained under a permanent travel ban with no expiry date, in violation of Saudi law and the kingdom's international obligations under the ICCPR. In December 2023 she filed a judicial complaint against the Presidency of State Security; on 10 September 2024 the Board of Grievances closed it for lack of jurisdiction after State Security said it had not received the case documents. In May 2024 rights groups said she remained in Saudi Arabia, unable to travel, and that her parents were also barred from travelling. In July 2025 ALQST said the ban on her was still applied unofficially, with no stated duration.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit:https://humena.org/defenders/loujain-al-hathloul/

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