

Advocacy dossier

Manahel al-Otaibi

مناهل العتيبي

Detained (pretrial) **Saudi Arabia**

Manahel al-Otaibi is a Saudi fitness instructor and women's rights activist who has been imprisoned since November 2022 over her social media posts on women's rights and her choice of clothing. In August 2025 the appeals court of the Specialised Criminal Court reduced her 11-year sentence to five years followed by a five-year travel ban, and she remains held in al-Malaz Prison in Riyadh.

01
The case at a glance

Manahel al-Otaibi is a Saudi fitness instructor and women's rights activist who has been imprisoned since November 2022 over her social media posts on women's rights and her choice of clothing. In August 2025 the appeals court of the Specialised Criminal Court reduced her 11-year sentence to five years followed by a five-year travel ban, and she remains held in al-Malaz Prison in Riyadh.

Status **Detained (pretrial)**	Arrested **15 Dec 2024**	Country **Saudi Arabia**

Sentence Five years' imprisonment followed by a five-year travel ban (appeals court of the Specialised Criminal Court, 21 August 2025), replacing an 11-year sentence imposed on 9 January 2024.

Charges Opposing laws relating to women, such as the male guardianship system and the hijab law (Anti-Cybercrime Law)
Participating in hashtags opposing these laws (Anti-Cybercrime Law)
Posting photos and video clips in 'indecent clothes', including going to shops without an abaya and publishing it on Snapchat (Anti-Cybercrime Law)
Terrorist offences under articles 43 and 44 of the counter-terrorism law

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Manahel al-Otaibi immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

02

How the case unfolded

16 November 2022

Arrest

Detained after interrogation over social media activity

She was summoned for interrogation at al-Sahafa police station in Riyadh over her social media activity, without a lawyer and without being told the charges, and was then transferred to al-Malaz Prison without an arrest warrant.

18 January 2023

Hearing

First hearing; case transferred to the Specialised Criminal Court

Her first hearing took place before the Riyadh Criminal Court on this date, according to MENA Rights Group. Amnesty International, citing court documents, reports that on 23 January 2023 the Criminal Court ruled that it had no jurisdiction and referred the case to the Specialised Criminal Court.

19 July 2023

Hearing

Trial opens before the Specialised Criminal Court

Her trial on terrorism-related charges opened before the Specialised Criminal Court and was adjourned without a new date. A hearing set for 26 July 2023 was cancelled on the day.

5 November 2023

Start of enforced disappearance

Contact with family cut off; held incommunicado

Her last call with relatives took place on this date, after which she was held incommunicado for more than four months. On 29 November 2023 her case was submitted to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

9 January 2024

Conviction

Sentenced to 11 years in a secret hearing

The Specialised Criminal Court sentenced her to 11 years in prison for 'terrorist offences' in a secret hearing of which her family was not informed.

14 April 2024

Reappearance in custody

Reports solitary confinement and a broken leg

In a call to her family after more than four months without contact, she said she was held in solitary confinement, had a broken leg from physical abuse and was being denied medical visits.

August 2024

Contact with the outside world cut off

Held incommunicado for a month

In August 2024 she was held incommunicado for one month. When she was able to call her family in September 2024 she said she had spent the month in solitary confinement, had been beaten by prison guards and fellow prisoners and had been made to clean toilets.

September 2024

Physical assault

Stabbed in the face with a pen in prison

In mid-September 2024 she was stabbed in the face with a pen by an unidentified woman, required stitches, and was then held in solitary confinement for two weeks.

3 November 2024

Appeal: judgment upheld

Appeal court upholds 11-year sentence

The Specialised Criminal Court of Appeal upheld the 11-year sentence. Her family learned of the ruling on this date.

28 November 2024

Other act

UN experts send communication to Saudi Arabia on her detention

UN Special Procedures mandate holders sent a communication to the Saudi authorities about her detention and that of her sister.

15 December 2024

Start of enforced disappearance

Last call to family before a second enforced disappearance

Her last phone call with her family took place on this date, after which her whereabouts were unknown to them. Amnesty International reported in February 2025 that she had been forcibly disappeared for about two months and that her family described her health as deteriorating.

March 2025

Reappearance in custody

Contact with family resumes after three months

Amnesty International reports that her second enforced disappearance, which began on 15 December 2024, ended in mid-March 2025.

11 May 2025

Medical care denied

Reports severe leg pain without adequate medical care

In a phone call to her family she reported severe pain in her leg and said she had not received adequate medical care. Amnesty International states that she has multiple sclerosis, a chronic neurological disorder.

21 August 2025

Appeal: sentence reduced

Re-sentenced to five years and a five-year travel ban

The appeals court of the Specialised Criminal Court overturned the 11-year term and re-sentenced her to five years in prison followed by a five-year travel ban. Several embassy officials were allowed to attend the hearing.

March 2026

Detention conditions and health

Still imprisoned under the reduced sentence

Amnesty International reported in March 2026 that she remains in prison and called for her immediate and unconditional release. ALQST and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights list her as held in al-Malaz Prison in Riyadh; the Gulf Centre expects her release in 2027, with time served counted.

03
The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Manahel al-Otaibi remains in al-Malaz Prison in Riyadh, serving a five-year sentence imposed on appeal in August 2025 and followed by a five-year travel ban. No release or further court decision has been reported.

Background and Work

Manahel al-Otaibi is a Saudi fitness instructor, social media influencer and women's rights activist. She used her accounts to support the campaign against the male guardianship system, including the hashtag calling for an end to male guardianship, and posted photographs of herself in public without an abaya. Her sisters are also known for their activism. Her older sister Maryam al-Otaibi, a campaigner against the guardianship system, was detained for 104 days in 2017 and is under a travel ban. Her sister Fawzia al-Otaibi left Saudi Arabia in 2022 after being summoned for questioning and was named in the same prosecution file.

The Arrest

On 16 November 2022 she was summoned for questioning at al-Sahafa police station in Riyadh about her social media activity. According to MENA Rights Group she was questioned without a lawyer and without being told the charges, and was transferred the same day to al-Malaz Prison without an arrest warrant. She was first charged under the Anti-Cybercrime Law with publishing content that, in the words of the court documents reviewed by Amnesty International, incited girls to renounce religious principles and violated public morals.

Detention Conditions and Health

Her family has repeatedly lost contact with her. She was held incommunicado from 5 November 2023 until 14 April 2024, when she told her family that she was in solitary confinement with a broken leg after a physical assault and was being denied medical visits. In August 2024 she was again held incommunicado for a month; she later said she had been beaten by guards and fellow prisoners and made to clean toilets. In mid-September 2024, according to ALQST, an unidentified woman stabbed her in the face with a pen, after which she needed stitches and was held in solitary confinement for two weeks. Her last call before a second enforced disappearance was on 15 December 2024, and contact resumed in mid-March 2025. Amnesty International reports that she has multiple sclerosis, which her family says developed after she witnessed Maryam's arrest, and on 11 May 2025 she said she had severe pain in her leg and was not receiving adequate medical care.

Legal Proceedings

Her first hearing was held before the Riyadh Criminal Court in January 2023. Amnesty International reports that the court ruled on 23 January 2023 that it had no jurisdiction and referred the case to the Specialised Criminal Court, where her trial opened on 19 July 2023. On 9 January 2024 the Specialised Criminal Court sentenced her to 11 years in prison in a closed hearing of which her family was not informed. The Saudi government's reply to UN experts on 20 January 2025 showed that she had been convicted of terrorist offences under articles 43 and 44 of the counter-terrorism

law. The Specialised Criminal Court of Appeal upheld the 11-year term, and her family learned of this on 3 November 2024. On 21 August 2025 the appeals court of the Specialised Criminal Court overturned that sentence and imposed five years in prison, including time served, followed by a five-year travel ban. Several embassy officials were allowed to attend. Her family has had no access to the court documents or the evidence against her.

International Response

MENA Rights Group and ALQST submitted her case to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on 29 November 2023 and to the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders on 14 December 2023. UN Special Procedures mandate holders sent a communication to Saudi Arabia about her and her sister on 28 November 2024, and the two organisations asked the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention for an opinion on 5 March 2025; no opinion has been published. Amnesty International has issued a series of urgent actions on her case since February 2024 and considers her imprisoned solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression. The Gulf Centre for Human Rights and ALQST also call for her release.

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

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