

ADVOCACY DOSSIER

# DR. MOHAMMED FAHD AL-QAHTANI

محمد فهد القحطاني

**At liberty** **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi economist and co-founder of ACPRA, jailed in 2013 on a 10-year sentence. Forcibly disappeared for two years after his term expired in 2022 and finally conditionally released in January 2025, subject to a 10-year travel ban.

HuMENA.

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Case reference HM-SA-2026-001

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# THE CASE AT A GLANCE

Saudi economist and co-founder of ACPRA, jailed in 2013 on a 10-year sentence. Forcibly disappeared for two years after his term expired in 2022 and finally conditionally released in January 2025, subject to a 10-year travel ban.

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|---|---|
| STATUS | **At liberty** |
| ARRESTED | **24 Oct 2022** |
| COUNTRY | **Saudi Arabia** |
| SENTENCE | **10 years imprisonment + 10-year travel ban (March 2013). Held an additional two years past sentence expiry through enforced disappearance.** |
| CHARGES | **Turning public opinion against the authorities; founding an unlicensed organisation (ACPRA); breaking allegiance to the ruler; insulting the judiciary; spreading chaos (tried under the Anti-Cybercrime Law and pre-2017 royal decrees).** |

WE CALL ON THE AUTHORITIES TO:

## WHAT WE ASK

01 Immediately lift the travel ban imposed on Mohammed Fahd Al-Qahtani and on any family members affected by the same order.

02 Restore valid travel documents and remove any border-watch flags placed in connection with peaceful human rights work.

03 Comply with the ICCPR Article 12 guarantee of freedom of movement.

**Latest updates on this case**
Scan the code or visit:
https://humena.org/defenders/mohammed-fahd-al-qahtani/

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# DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS

| | INTERNATIONAL STANDARD |
|---|---|
| **Arbitrary detention** | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9 |
| **Denial of family visits** | UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rule 58 |
| **Enforced disappearance** | International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 2<br>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 9, 16 |
| **Physical assault** | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 7, 9 |
| **Travel ban** | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 12 |
| **Unfair trial** | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14 |

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# HOW THE CASE UNFOLDED

**March 2012**

INTERROGATION

### Interrogated over his work with ACPRA and his peaceful activism

interrogated regarding his work with ACPRA and his peaceful activism

**June 2012**

HEARING

### Trial opens in Riyadh

His trial with fellow ACPRA co-founder Abdullah al-Hamid opened before the Criminal Court in Riyadh on charges linked to ACPRA. He was not held during the trial.

**9 March 2013**

CONVICTION

### Sentenced to 10 years in prison

On 9 March 2013, the Criminal Court in Riyadh sentenced him to 10 years in prison

**9 March 2013**

ARREST

### Taken into custody after the verdict

The judge ordered his immediate arrest after sentencing. He was held in al-Malaz prison and later in al-Ha'ir prison.

**September 2015**

CONTEXT

### UN body finds his detention arbitrary

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, in Opinion 38/2015, found his detention arbitrary.

**November 2018**

CONTEXT

### Right Livelihood Award

He received the Right Livelihood Award together with Abdullah al-Hamid and Waleed Abu al-Khair.

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|---|---|---|
| **December 2020** | CONTEXT | **Hunger strikes in prison**<br>He went on hunger strike in December 2020, March 2021 and August 2021 in protest at the denial of family contact, books and medication. |
| **April 2021** | CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD CUT OFF | **Held incommunicado after testing positive for Covid-19**<br>In April 2021, he was held incommunicado after testing positive for Covid-19 |
| **26 May 2022** | PHYSICAL ASSAULT | **Assaulted in prison**<br>He was assaulted in prison by a fellow inmate. |
| **24 October 2022** | ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE | **Forcibly disappeared after his ten-year sentence expired**<br>His ten-year sentence expired in 2022, but he was not released. Authorities held him without acknowledgement and his family had no information about his fate or whereabouts for two years. |
| **22 November 2022** | DETENTION BEYOND THE END OF A SENTENCE | **Not released when his sentence ended**<br>The authorities failed to release Al-Qahtani on 22 November 2022, when he finished serving his prison sentence. |
| **3 November 2024** | REAPPEARANCE IN CUSTODY | **Reappeared in a phone call to his family**<br>On 3 November 2024 he called his family for about ten minutes, the first contact after more than two years of enforced disappearance. |
| **7 January 2025** | CONDITIONAL RELEASE | **Conditionally released after twelve years in custody**<br>Released on 7 January 2025 after twelve years in prison for his human rights work, having served a ten-year sentence that expired in 2022 and two further years of unacknowledged detention. |
| **7 January 2025** | CONDITIONAL RELEASE | **Ten-year travel ban imposed on release**<br>Released subject to a ten-year travel ban that prevents him from joining his wife and five children, who live in the United States. |

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# THE FULL STORY

## Background and work

Dr. Mohammed Fahd al-Qahtani is a Saudi economist trained in the United States and a co-founder of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), one of the kingdom's first independent human rights organisations. ACPRA built a public archive of arbitrary detention cases, advocated for constitutional reform, and pressed for the rights of political prisoners and their families through plain-language reports, press interviews and direct petitions to the royal court.

## Arrest and detention

After years of intermittent harassment, he was placed on trial, while still free, in 2012 alongside fellow ACPRA co-founder Abdullah al-Hamid. In March 2013 a court in Riyadh sentenced him to ten years in prison followed by a ten-year travel ban. The charges centred on the founding and work of ACPRA itself: turning public opinion against the authorities, founding an unlicensed organisation, and breaking allegiance to the ruler.

## Conviction and imprisonment

He served his sentence at al-Ha'ir prison south of Riyadh. ACPRA was forcibly dissolved during his trial; every one of its co-founders was either imprisoned or forced into exile. His original term expired on 22 November 2022, but he was not released. Instead, the authorities placed him in incommunicado detention and refused to acknowledge his whereabouts. His family in the United States went two years without confirmation that he was alive.

## Current status as of 2026

On 7 January 2025, after nearly twelve years in custody, he was conditionally released. The conditions include a ten-year travel ban that prevents him from rejoining his wife Maha al-Qahtani and their five children, all of whom live in the United States. He has not resumed any public human rights work; ACPRA itself remains banned.

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# SAMPLE LETTER

Copy it, adapt it and send it from your own address.

Your Excellency,

I am writing to demand the immediate lifting of the arbitrary travel ban imposed on Mohammed Fahd Al-Qahtani, economist and co-founder, Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) in Saudi Arabia.

In brief: Saudi economist and co-founder of ACPRA, jailed in 2013 on a 10-year sentence. Forcibly disappeared for two years after his term expired in 2022 and finally conditionally released in January 2025, subject to a 10-year travel ban.

I respectfully urge your authorities to:
1. Immediately lift the travel ban imposed on Mohammed Fahd Al-Qahtani and on any family members affected by the same order;
2. Restore valid travel documents and remove any border-watch flags placed in connection with peaceful human rights work;
3. Comply with the ICCPR Article 12 guarantee of freedom of movement.

I will continue to monitor this case until Mohammed Fahd Al-Qahtani's freedom of movement is restored.

Respectfully,

[Your name]
[Your city, country]
8 November 2026