

ADVOCACY DOSSIER

RAIF BADAWI

رائف بدوي

At liberty **Saudi Arabia**

Raif Badawi, a Saudi blogger and co-founder of Free Saudi Liberals, served ten years in prison for posts about free speech and pluralism. He was sentenced to 1,000 lashes, fined one million riyals, and released in 2022 subject to a travel ban.

HuMENA.

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Case reference HM-SA-2026-002

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THE CASE AT A GLANCE

Raif Badawi, a Saudi blogger and co-founder of Free Saudi Liberals, served ten years in prison for posts about free speech and pluralism. He was sentenced to 1,000 lashes, fined one million riyals, and released in 2022 subject to a travel ban.

STATUS	**At liberty**
ARRESTED	**17 Jun 2012**
COUNTRY	**Saudi Arabia**
SENTENCE	**Ten years in prison, one thousand lashes (fifty administered, remainder suspended), fine of one million Saudi riyals, ten-year ban on internet use after release, and ten-year travel ban after release.**
CHARGES	**Insulting Islam through electronic channels** **Apostasy (later dropped or not pursued)**

WE CALL ON THE AUTHORITIES TO:

WHAT WE ASK

01 Immediately end all harassment, summons, surveillance, and threats against the family of Raif Badawi in Saudi Arabia.

02 Cease the use of family members as leverage to pressure Raif Badawi 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 Raif Badawi and on any family members affected by the same order.

Latest updates on this case
Scan the code or visit:
https://humena.org/defenders/raif-badawi/

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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
Denial of medical care	UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rules 24 to 27
Inhumane detention conditions	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10 UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules)
Judicial harassment	UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12
Press freedom violation	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19
Prolonged pretrial detention	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9(3)
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

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HOW THE CASE UNFOLDED

March 2008

ARREST

Detained and questioned after founding the website

Soon after he set up the Free Saudi Liberals website, he was detained and questioned over accusations linked to apostasy and his online writing.

March 2008

RELEASE

Released after questioning

He was released after questioning. Prosecutors later dropped the 2008 accusations.

2009

TRAVEL BAN IMPOSED

Barred from travel; assets frozen

The authorities barred him from leaving Saudi Arabia, and his and his wife's bank accounts were reported frozen.

17 June 2012

ARREST

Arrest in Jeddah

Raif Badawi was arrested in Jeddah on charges of insulting Islam through electronic channels.

July 2013

CONVICTION

First sentence

A criminal court sentenced Badawi to seven years in prison and six hundred lashes. The sentence was later appealed and overturned.

7 May 2014

CONVICTION

Retrial and harsher sentence

After a retrial, Badawi was sentenced to ten years in prison, one thousand lashes, a fine of one million Saudi riyals, a ban on internet use for ten years, and a ten-year travel ban.

9 January 2015

TORTURE

Public flogging outside mosque

Badawi was flogged fifty times in public outside Al Juffali Mosque in Jeddah after Friday prayers. The remaining lashes were postponed indefinitely following international condemnation.

7 June 2015

FINAL JUDGMENT

Supreme Court makes the sentence final

The Supreme Court upheld the sentence of ten years and 1,000 lashes. The judgment is final.

July 2018

CONTEXT

Sister Samar Badawi arrested

His sister Samar Badawi, a women's rights defender, was arrested. She was released in June 2021 after her sentence expired.

17 September 2019

HUNGER STRIKE BEGINS

Hunger strike begins

Badawi began an open-ended hunger strike in protest of the confiscation of his books and medication and worsening detention conditions.

21 September 2019

HUNGER STRIKE ENDS

Hunger strike ends

Badawi ended his hunger strike after receiving a visit from the Saudi Human Rights Commission.

11 March 2022

RELEASE

Released after full sentence

Raif Badawi was released from Buraiman Prison after serving the full ten years.

11 March 2022

TRAVEL BAN IMPOSED

Ten-year travel ban from his 2014 sentence takes effect on his release

The Interior Ministry confirmed the ten-year travel ban from his 2014 sentence, which can be lifted only by royal pardon. A ten-year ban on media use also applies.

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THE FULL STORY

Update, 13 May 2026: Badawi was released on 11 March 2022 after completing his ten-year prison sentence. He is now subject to a ten-year travel ban that prevents him from joining his wife and three children, who live in Sherbrooke, Quebec, and a ten-year ban on social-media use.

Background and Work

Raif Badawi created the Free Saudi Liberals website in 2008 as a forum for open discussion of religion, politics, and society. In 2008 he was detained and questioned over accusations linked to apostasy, then released, and in 2009 he was barred from travel and his assets were frozen. The site published essays and hosted debates on topics the Saudi state considered off-limits: secularism, the separation of religion from law, and abuses by the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, commonly known as the religious police. Badawi moderated discussions and contributed his own writing. He advocated for freedom of conscience and expression, framing them as universal rights that should apply even in the Kingdom.

His posts did not call for violence or the overthrow of the state. They called for debate. That was enough to make him a target.

Arrest and Charges

Raif Badawi was arrested on 17 June 2012 in Jeddah. The charge was insulting Islam through electronic channels. Prosecutors initially added a charge of apostasy, which carries the death penalty under Saudi law. The trial opened in a criminal court that lacked jurisdiction over religious crimes, prolonging the proceedings and leaving Badawi in pre-trial detention for over a year.

In July 2013 he was sentenced to seven years in prison and six hundred lashes. That sentence was appealed and overturned. In May 2014, after a retrial before a different chamber, he was sentenced to ten years in prison, one thousand lashes to be administered in twenty weekly sessions of fifty each, a fine of one million Saudi riyals (approximately 240,000 euros), a ban on using the internet for ten years after release, and a ten-year travel ban. The harsher sentence followed intervention by prosecutors seeking a more severe punishment.

Public Flogging and International Response

On 9 January 2015, Raif Badawi was taken from Buraiman Prison in Jeddah to the plaza outside Al Juffali Mosque. After Friday prayers, in front of a crowd of worshippers and onlookers, he was flogged fifty times. Video and images of the flogging circulated internationally. Governments, UN bodies, and human rights organisations condemned the punishment as torture. Under sustained diplomatic pressure, Saudi authorities postponed further flogging sessions indefinitely, citing medical grounds. The remaining 950 lashes were never administered, but the sentence was never annulled.

Raif Badawi remained imprisoned in Buraiman Prison throughout the remainder of his sentence. His wife and children, having fled to Canada in 2012, continued to campaign for his release. The case became emblematic of Saudi Arabia's criminalisation of peaceful expression and the use of judicial punishment as spectacle and deterrence.

Hunger Strike and Detention Conditions

On 17 September 2019, Badawi began an open-ended hunger strike. Prison authorities had confiscated his books and essential medication. The protest drew attention to deteriorating conditions and the absence of any prospect for early release. Four days later, on 21 September, he ended the strike after receiving a visit from the Saudi Human Rights Commission. It remains unclear what assurances, if any, were given. No public statement followed the visit, and his detention continued unchanged.

Release and Ongoing Restrictions

Raif Badawi was released on 11 March 2022 after serving his full ten-year sentence. He did not receive early release, pardon, or commutation. The ten-year travel ban imposed as part of his 2014 sentence remains in force. He is prohibited from leaving Saudi Arabia until March 2032. He remains separated from his wife and children, who hold asylum status in Canada. The travel ban functions as a continued punishment and a tool of family separation. Badawi cannot reunite with his children, and they cannot safely return to Saudi Arabia while he remains a convicted blasphemer under Saudi law.

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SAMPLE LETTER

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

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express grave concern about the campaign of reprisals targeting the family of human rights defender Raif Badawi, blogger and activist; co-founder of the Free Saudi Liberals website documenting abuses by religious and morality police. Punishing relatives for the peaceful work of a defender is collective punishment and a violation of international law.

In brief: Raif Badawi, a Saudi blogger and co-founder of Free Saudi Liberals, served ten years in prison for posts about free speech and pluralism. He was sentenced to 1,000 lashes, fined one million riyals, and released in 2022 subject to a travel ban.

I respectfully urge your authorities to:
1. Immediately end all harassment, summons, surveillance, and threats against the family of Raif Badawi in Saudi Arabia;
2. Cease the use of family members as leverage to pressure Raif Badawi into silence;
3. Drop any fabricated charges against family members and unblock their travel, financial, and professional rights;
4. Comply with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which explicitly prohibits reprisals against the families of defenders;
5. Immediately lift the travel ban imposed on Raif Badawi and on any family members affected by the same order.

I will continue to monitor the welfare of Raif Badawi's family in Saudi Arabia and will publicly raise concerns at every level until the reprisals stop.

Respectfully,

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