

ADVOCACY DOSSIER

ZIAD AL-SUFYANI

زياد السفياني

At liberty **Saudi Arabia**

Ziad Al-Sufyani is a podiatrist who founded a university reading club and edited Wikipedia pages on women's rights. He was arrested during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown and sentenced to eight years in prison. He was released in March 2025.

HuMENA.

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Case reference HM-SA-2020-001

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THE CASE AT A GLANCE

Ziad Al-Sufyani is a podiatrist who founded a university reading club and edited Wikipedia pages on women's rights. He was arrested during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown and sentenced to eight years in prison. He was released in March 2025.

STATUS	**At liberty**
ARRESTED	**Sep 2020**
COUNTRY	**Saudi Arabia**
SENTENCE	**Eight years in prison.**

WE CALL ON THE AUTHORITIES TO:

WHAT WE ASK

01 Quash the conviction and drop any charges that remain on record against Ziad Al-Sufyani in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Ziad Al-Sufyani faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Ziad Al-Sufyani can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

04 Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

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

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DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS

	INTERNATIONAL STANDARD
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)
Prolonged pretrial detention	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9(3)
Unfair trial	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

HOW THE CASE UNFOLDED

September 2020

ARREST

Arrested during COVID-19 lockdown

Ziad Al-Sufyani was arrested alongside his colleague Osama Khalid during a wave of detentions targeting online contributors and activists.

2022

CONVICTION

Sentenced to eight years in prison

The Specialized Criminal Court sentenced Ziad to eight years in prison. Observers were denied access to hearings and no charges were made public. The verdict became known in January 2023.

11 March 2025

RELEASE

Released from detention

ALQST for Human Rights confirmed that Ziad Al-Sufyani had been freed after more than four and a half years in Al-Ha'ir Prison.

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THE FULL STORY

Background and Work

Ziad Al-Sufyani worked as a podiatrist in Saudi Arabia. In 2012 he founded the Taif University Reading Club, an initiative that brought together students and intellectuals interested in literature and social issues. The club became a forum for discussion and intellectual exchange at a time when civil society organizing faced increasing restrictions.

Ziad was also active online. He served as an administrator for the Arabic-language edition of Wikipedia, where he contributed to the creation and editing of numerous entries. Among the pages he worked on was that of Loujain Al-Hathloul, the prominent Saudi women's rights defender who was herself imprisoned for her activism. Wikipedia administrators perform editorial and moderation functions, ensuring that content meets the platform's standards for neutrality and verifiability. In Saudi Arabia, editing pages related to dissidents or human rights issues has increasingly been treated as suspicious activity by the authorities.

Arrest and Detention

Ziad Al-Sufyani was arrested in September 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Saudi Arabia was under strict lockdown measures at the time, and a wave of arrests swept up activists, writers, and online contributors. Ziad was detained alongside his colleague Osama Khalid, another doctor and Wikipedian. The circumstances of their arrests have not been disclosed, and the legal basis for their detention remains unclear.

Few details about Ziad's case have emerged. His detention was conducted in near-total secrecy, with no public charges announced and no information provided to family members or independent observers. He was held at Al-Ha'ir Prison, a sprawling facility south of Riyadh known for housing political prisoners and individuals convicted by the Specialized Criminal Court.

Trial and Sentence

Ziad was tried before the Specialized Criminal Court, a tribunal established in 2008 to hear terrorism cases but increasingly used to prosecute peaceful dissent. The court operates with minimal procedural safeguards. Observers were denied access to hearings in Ziad's case, and no information about the charges or evidence against him was made public.

He was sentenced to eight years in prison. The legal grounds for the sentence are unknown. The Specialized Criminal Court has become notorious for handing down lengthy sentences to writers, activists, and online critics under vaguely worded counter-terrorism and cybercrime statutes. Defendants are often convicted on the basis of social media posts, private communications, or their associations with other dissidents.

Release

On 11 March 2025, the organization ALQST for Human Rights reported that Ziad Al-Sufyani had been released from detention. He had spent more than four and a half years in prison. The terms of his release, whether he was granted pardon, completed his sentence, or remains subject to post-release restrictions, have not been disclosed.

Osama Khalid, the colleague arrested alongside Ziad in 2020, was still imprisoned as of March 2025.

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SAMPLE LETTER

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

Your Excellency,

I am writing about the case of Ziad Al-Sufyani, podiatrist; founder of Taif University Reading Club; Arabic-language administrator on Wikipedia in Saudi Arabia, who has been released. I am writing to ask that the case be closed properly and that no further reprisal follows.

In brief: Ziad Al-Sufyani is a podiatrist who founded a university reading club and edited Wikipedia pages on women's rights. He was arrested during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown and sentenced to eight years in prison. He was released in March 2025.

I respectfully urge your authorities to:
1. Quash the conviction and drop any charges that remain on record against Ziad Al-Sufyani in connection with peaceful human rights work;
2. Confirm publicly that Ziad Al-Sufyani faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case;
3. Guarantee that Ziad Al-Sufyani can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal;
4. Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

I will continue to follow this case until the record against Ziad Al-Sufyani is cleared and no reprisal remains.

Respectfully,

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