Saudi Arabia | NGOs call for immediate release of Saudi human rights defender Mohammed al-Bejadi, still held two years after his sentence ended

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We, the undersigned organisations, express deep concern over the continued arbitrary detention of the Saudi human rights defender **Mohammed al-Bejadi** more than two years beyond his sentence. His continuing detention, along with countless others, demonstrates that despite a recent spate of prisoner releases, the Saudi authorities' severe repression of rights activists and critics remains. We call for his immediate release, along with all others arbitrarily detained in the kingdom for peacefully exercising their fundamental freedoms.

Al-Bejadi, a founding member in 2009 of the now-banned Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), has been arrested and imprisoned three times for his peaceful human rights activism, most recently on 24 May 2018 during a crackdown on women's rights defenders. He was subsequently sentenced to an egregious 10-year prison term, with five years suspended, which expired in April 2023.

More than two years later, he remains in Buraydah Prison, where he has been denied access to legal representation. According to ALQST, an independent Saudi human rights group, he has also experienced torture and other ill-treatment, including physical abuse and prolongedd incommunicado detention.

The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, highlighted al-Bejadi's case in April 2025 to draw attention to a worrying trend in Saudi Arabia, in which the authorities continue to hold prisoners past their completed sentences, in violation of basic international standards and Saudi Arabia's own laws.

Two other prominent human rights defenders, **Mohammed al-Qahtani** – another ACPRA co-founder – and **Essa al-Nukheifi**, were held arbitrarily for more than two years beyond their prison terms before being conditionally released in January 2025.

In other instances, when political prisoners have neared the end of their prison terms Saudi authorities have retried them and increased their sentences. Besides inflicting further injustice on these people after years of arbitrary imprisonment, the failure to release prisoners whose sentences have concluded creates fear that they too may be retried.

Saudi authorities have released dozens of people imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights in recent months, yet continue to arbitrarily hold many more. Released prisoners continue to face heavy restrictions, such as arbitrary travel bans and having to wear an ankle monitor.

Among human rights defenders still held are another ACPRA member, **Issa al-Hamid**, (sentenced to nine years' imprisonment), **Mohammed al-Otaibi** (17 years), **Waleed Abu al-Khair** (15 years) and **Khaled al-Omair** (nine years) and **Israa al-Ghomgham** (13 years), who took part in peaceful protests against anti-Shi'a discrimination in the country's Eastern Province in and after 2011. Others include a Red Crescent worker **Abdulrahman al-Sadhan** (sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment), who remains forcibly disappeared; a fitness instructor and women's rights activist **Manahel al-Otaibi** (11 years), who is facing retrial; **Nourah al-Qahtani** (35 years); a physician and Wikipedia administrator **Osama Khalid** (32 years); a cartoonist, **Mohammed Al Hazzaa al-Ghamdi** (23 years); clerics **Mohammed al-Habib** (12 years), **Salman al-Odah** and **Hassan Farhan al-Maliki** (the last two facing lengthy delays in their trials); **10 Nubian Egyptians** (between 10 and 18 years); and dozens of members of the Huwaitat tribe serving prison sentences of various lengths or on death row.

Meanwhile, the Saudi authorities' record of rights violations continues to deteriorate, notably with their escalating use of the death penalty, including the recent execution of a prominent Saudi journalist Turki al-Jasser, and a notable surge in executions of foreign nationals for non-violent drug-related offences.

Al-Bejadi is one of several people arbitrarily imprisoned whose activism stretches back for decades. He spent four months in prison without charge or trial from September 2007 to January 2008, and was again jailed for more than five years, from March 2011 to April 2016, after taking part in a protest outside the Ministry of Interior. During that protest, he said, "I do not have a family member in detention, but we must defend not only our own family but our whole country and all those who are oppressed. *All prisoners of conscience are my family."*

The undersigned organisations call on the Saudi authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Mohammed al-Bejadi, all others detained beyond the completion of their prison sentences, and all individuals who are imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Signatories:

1. ALQST for Human Rights
2. DAWN
3. European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR)
4. FairSquare
5. Freedom House
6. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
7. Human Rights Watch
8. HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
9. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

10. MENA Rights Group
11. Middle East Democracy Center (MEDC)
12. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

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