



NGOs Call for Immediate Release of Saudi Human Rights Lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair

08 January 2015 – On 12 January 2015, the public prosecutor of Saudi Arabia will again present his case against human rights defender Waleed Abu al-Khair in an appellate proceeding at the Saudi Specialized Criminal Court. The government seeks to obtain a harsher sentence on charges for which Abu al-Khair has already been convicted and imprisoned. Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BIRD) are deeply concerned that a second prosecution of Abu al-Khair will violate his internationally-guaranteed due process rights and subject him to double jeopardy. For these reasons, we call for his immediate and unconditional release and for the original sentence against Abu al-Khair to be vacated.

Waleed Abu al-Khair is a lawyer and human rights activist who founded the [Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia](#) (MHRSA) in 2009. On 6 July 2014, he was [convicted by the Specialized Criminal Court](#) in Jeddah of “making international organizations hostile to the kingdom,” “publicly slandering the judiciary,” and “founding an unlicensed organization.” The court [sentenced](#) Abu al-Khair to 15 years in prison, a 15 year travel ban, and a fine equivalent to \$53,000. This conviction came on the heels of a separate criminal proceeding in October 2013, at which he was sentenced to [three months in prison](#) for signing a public statement critical of the government.

“Instead of seeking a harsher sentence against Abu al-Khair, the Saudi government must immediately vacate his conviction and drop all charges against him,” said Husain Abdulla, Executive Director of ADHRB. “Abu al-Khair is a human rights lawyer and prisoner of conscience who should be at home with his family, not imprisoned for exercising his basic human rights.”

Abu al-Khair was [tried and convicted](#) under new anti-terrorism legislation. Promulgated in February 2014, the Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and Its Financing ostensibly allows the Saudi government to better prosecute terrorists. In [practice](#), however, the government uses the law’s ambiguous language to target and imprison human rights [activists](#) and other nonviolent political [dissidents](#).

“Abu al-Khair’s conviction is further proof that the Saudi government is abusing anti-terrorism legislation to silence dissent, not protect Saudi citizens,” added Sayed Ahmed, Director of Advocacy for BIRD. “As a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, it is unconscionable for Saudi Arabia to use draconian laws to violate internationally-protected human rights.”

We, the undersigned human rights organizations, call on the United States, the European Union, and other national and international bodies to actively engage the Government of Saudi Arabia to:

- Immediately vacate Waleed Abu al-Khair’s conviction, release him from custody, and drop all charges against him in relation to or in retaliation against his work;
- Replace anti-terrorism laws with legislation that does not encroach upon human rights; and
- Ensure that all civil society organizations and human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia are able to conduct their work without fear of retaliation or reprisal.