



Waleed Abu al-Khair

Waleed Abu al-Khair is a prominent Saudi Arabian human rights defender, lawyer and the head of Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia, an independent human rights organization founded in 2008. He has provided legal representation to many victims of human rights violations, including Raif Badawi, and has received numerous international awards for his courageous human rights activism.

Since 2011, the Saudi Arabian authorities have actively harassed and monitored Waleed Abu al-Khair. He has been arrested, interrogated and banned from travelling, in an attempt to force him to stop his human rights activism. He has been detained since 15 April 2014 and is currently serving a 15-year prison sentence in al-Ha'ir prison in Riyadh where he has suffered from ill-treatment by prison authorities.

Waleed Abu al-Khair became the first Saudi Arabian human rights defender to have been sentenced under the country's new counter-terror law. The Specialized Criminal Court sentenced him on 6 July 2014 to 15 years in prison, a 15-year travel ban and a fine of 200,000 Saudi Arabian riyals (about US\$53,000), but ordered him to serve only 10 years in prison. The judge who upheld his sentence upon appeal on 12 January 2015 however, ordered him to serve the full 15 prison term because he has refused to apologize for his "offenses". Waleed Abu al-Khair continues to refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the Specialized Criminal Court.

Having failed to silence Waleed Abu al-Khair through extra-judicial and other arbitrary means, the Saudi Arabian authorities convicted and imprisoned him for his work protecting and promoting human rights in Saudi Arabia. He is a prisoner of conscience and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

Waleed Abu al-Khair's detention is a worrying example of how Saudi Arabian authorities are abusing the justice system to silence peaceful dissent. Nobody should be jailed for peacefully exercising the right to freedom of expression.

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