



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

SAUDI ARABIA STRIKES AGAIN BY HANDING DEATH PENALTY TO HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS: ISRAA AL-GHOMGHAM THE FIRST FEMALE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST TO BE SENTENCED TO DEATH IN SAUDI ARABIA



Israa al-Ghomgham as a child, and five other Saudi defendants who have been told this month they face the death penalty, including Ghomgham's husband, Moussa al-Hashem, bottom centre.

State prosecutors in Saudi Arabia are calling for the death penalty for Israa al-Ghomgham, a human rights activist from Qatif who was arrested in 2015. If executed, it will be the first time the country has carried out capital punishment on a woman.

On 6 August, in a first hearing before the [Specialised Criminal Court](#) (SCC) in the capital, the public prosecutor recommended the death penalty for six defendants,



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including Ghomgham and her husband, Moussa al-Hashem, who have been jailed for nearly three years on charges of anti-government protests, incitement to disobedience of the ruler, and providing moral support to participants in anti-government protests in the Shia-majority eastern region of Qatif.

Activism and arrest

Israa al-Ghomgham, 29, has been imprisoned since 2015, after taking part in anti-government protests and campaigning for human rights on social media.

Protests began during the Arab Spring in 2011 and 2012 in Qatif, a port city in Saudi Arabia's Shiite Eastern Province. Protestors demanded the end of anti-Shia discrimination and the release of political prisoners. Saudi authorities responded with a severe wave of repression and violence in which dozens of activists were killed or arrested and executed.

During this time, Ghomgham called for fundamental and basic civil and political rights such as peaceful assembly and expression, called for the release of prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders and expressed her peaceful opinions on social media platforms.

Ghomgham, 29, and Hashem were arrested on 8 December 2015 in a house raid by Saudi security forces. She has been in detention for 32 months but was recently put before the SCC in Riyadh.

Lack of judicial guarantees

Ghomgham was not provided with any counsel during her 32 months in detainment. She only received a lawyer for her trial after her father wrote a petition for donations to help cover the 300,000 Saudi riyal (\$80,000) cost of providing her with one, and a lawyer saw the petition circulating on social media and offered their services *pro bono*.



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Final decision

The final session for her case is to take place only on October 28. Then a judge will either confirm or reverse the earlier death penalty recommendation of the public prosecutor in August.

Beheadings usually take place in Saudi Arabia after the decision is ratified by the king - in this case, King Salman bin Abdulaziz.

Lack of judicial independence

The SCC, responsible for implementing the notorious 2017 counterterrorism law, is under total control by the king, and therefore many of these trials are merely show trial and have pre-determined outcomes which serve the narrative of the state.

The call of the public prosecution for a death sentence for the detainee is a dangerous indicator that the trial outcome will lead to a death penalty sentence being issued because the Saudi mechanisms involved in the prosecution process are not independent and serve the needs of King Salman directly.

Charges do not warrant death penalty even under Saudi law

None of the charges made against Ghomgham involve the use of violence and so do not warrant the death penalty under Saudi law, rather, all the charges against Ghomgham were related to her activism.

It's largely a revenge against the Arab Spring, and a punishment for Qatif, which witnessed the largest protests since 2011.

At least 58 people, most of them Shia, are currently on death row in Saudi Arabia, 31 of whom had their verdicts confirmed by the High Court.



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Counterterrorism legislation against peaceful human rights activists

A [UN report](#) released in June stated that the Gulf kingdom was systematically using its counterterrorism laws to suppress human rights defenders.

“Those who peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression are systematically persecuted in Saudi Arabia,” the report said. “Many languish in prison for years. Others have been executed after blatant miscarriages of justice.”

Saudi Arabia remains “one of the most prolific executioners in the world”, beheading at least 100 people in 2017 alone, according to [Amnesty International](#).

Saudi Arabia has highest rates of executions in the world

According to [Human Rights Watch](#) Saudi Arabia has executed 48 people just in the last four months. Half are for non-violent drug charges. The U.S.-based group urged Saudi Arabia to improve what it terms a "notoriously unfair criminal justice system".

Since 2015, Saudi Arabia has executed seven women, on average two per year, for crimes such as murder.

The country has one of the highest rates in the world for executions. According to Amnesty International, Saudi Arabia carries out the third-highest number of executions per year, behind only China and Iran. In 2017, nearly 150 people were executed, and the kingdom is on track to execute more people than ever in 2018.

Persecution against Shia

Qatif is the centre of the Saudi Kingdom's Shiite minority population. Despite the province being home to most of the kingdom's oil resources, Shiites are denied economic opportunities and are politically repressed, which has consistently driven



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protest movements in the region, including those in the 2011 to 2014 period inspired by the Arab Spring movement.

ICSFT condemns in the strongest terms the decision of the Saudi court to impose the death penalty against peaceful human rights activists based on non-serious and non-violent charges, which does not match the international law criteria of “most serious crimes”.

We also condemn the fact that these trials failed to meet fair trial conditions, and that the detainees were ill-treated and tortured.

We urge the international community to condemn this violation of international law – that is being committed exclusively to persecute human rights defenders – and to take actions in order to stop the Saudi authorities from continuing these barbaric practices.

Finally we call the Saudi authorities for the immediate and unconditional release of all human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience.