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Waleed Abu al-Khair Briefing

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I: Case Timeline

2007

- First reform petition calling to limit monarchy

2009

- Founded Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia

2010

- Abu al-Khair represented women's rights activist Samar Badawi (whom he married in 2011)

2011

- **September:** After returning to Saudi Arabia for Ramadan (while enrolled in a doctoral program abroad) Abu al-Khair called before Criminal Court in Jeddah and charged with "offending the judiciary" and "attempting to distort the reputation of the kingdom"
- Abu al-Khair signs petitions to King Abdullah calling for political reform

2012

- **March 21:** Summoned and informed of travel ban due to "security considerations" five days before he is due to begin US State Department-sponsored Leaders in Democracy Fellowship in Syracuse
- Registered Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia as an NGO in Canada

2013

- **October 29:** Sentenced to 3-month imprisonment by Criminal Court in Jeddah
- **October 6:** Trial before SCC in Riyadh begins (charges include planning to overthrow government, "insulting the judiciary," creating unlicensed organization)
- **October 2:** Abu al-Khair arrested in Jeddah, charged with "organizing illegal gatherings;" transferred to interrogation office; subsequently released on bail

2014

- **August 11:** Transferred to al-Malaz prison in Riyadh
- **July 10:** UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued statement condemning sentence
- **July 6:** Abu al-Khair sentenced to 15 years in prison, 15-year travel ban and 200,000 riyal fine by SCC.
- **May 27:** Transferred to Briman prison in Jeddah
- **May 7:** Abu al-Khair's client (and brother-in-law), the blogger Raif Badawi sentenced to 10 years, 1000 lashes, and 1-million riyal fine by Criminal Court in Jeddah
- **April 15:** Detained without explanation after appearing for 5th hearing at trial; moved to al-Ha'ir prison in Riyadh.
- **February 6:** Court of Appeal in Mecca upheld Oct. 29, 2013 sentencing

2015

- **January 16:** 8 US Senators write letter to King Abdullah calling for release of both Badawi and Abu al-Khair
- **January 15:** State Department issues press report (which refers to 2013 Human Rights Report)

- **January 12:** Sentence upheld by appeal by Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh; sentence extended from 10 years to 15.
- **June 12:** 2015 20th Lodovic-Trarieux Human Rights International Prize
On June 12, 2015 a panel of European attorneys and representatives of European Bars recognized Mr. Abu Al-Kahir with the most prestigious human rights award, the **20th Lodovic-Trarieux Human Rights International Prize** award <http://www.ludovictrarieux.org/uk-page3.callplt2015.htm> which was first given to Nelson Mandela in 1985. Waleed Abu Al-Khair has been unjustly imprisoned in Saudi Arabia as a result of his human rights advocacy activities in Saudi Arabia since February 2014.

II: Government Statements/Action

a) US Government Action

- State Department press releases reference the most recent **Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 and 2014**, where Abu al-Khair's case is discussed beneath the subheading "Free Speech"
- **July 7, 2014:** US State Department [Press Release](#) on sentencing of Abu al-Khair (Jen Psaki, Department Spokesperson, Washington, DC)
- See document on press briefings: Deputy Spokesperson Harf fielded questions (from the same journalist) about Abu al-Khair on Jan 13th and 14th.
- **Jan 15, 2015:** US State Department [Press Release](#) on Sentence of Abu al-Khair (Marie Harf, Deputy Department Spokesperson, Washington, DC)
- **Jan 16, 2015:** 8 US Senators sign [letter](#) to King Abdullah calling for release of Raif Badawi and Waleed Abu al-Khair.

b) United Nations Statement

- **July 10, 2014:** United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Navi Pillay) [issued a statement](#) about Abu al-Khair's case.
For more information or media requests, contact Ravina Shamdasani (+41 22 917 9769 / rshamdasani@ohchr.org) or Cécile Pouilly (+41 22 917 9310 / cpouilly@ohchr.org)

c) Foreign Government Statements/Action

- **United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office** lists Saudi Arabia as a "country of concern" and [mentions Abu al-Khair's 3-month sentence](#) in their 2013 Human Rights and Democracy Report:

III: NGO Statements/Action

- a) Organizations that have issued statements:
Amnesty International (and some of its national chapters), Human Rights Watch, Front Line Defenders, Reporters Without Borders, Gulf Center for Human Rights, Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain/ Bahrain Center for Human Rights, PEN International (plus national chapters), Law Society of Upper Canada, American Humanist Association, Center for Inquiry
- b) Chronological List of Statements made by NGOs
- **March 27, 2012: Amnesty International** gives [statement](#) after Abu al-Khair's travel ban. Ann Harrison, who gave the statement at the time, now works for PEN International and can be reached at Ann.Harrison@pen-international.org. Amnesty International [media contacts](#).
 - **June 20, 2014: Reporters Without Borders** deputy research chief Virginie Dangles condemned jailing; RWB published a [story](#)
 - **June 25, 2014: Center For Inquiry** writes [letter](#) to Secretary John Kerry, cosigned with **American Humanist Association** and others
 - **July 7, 2014:** Most recent [update](#) to **Front Line Defenders'** coverage of case
 - **August 16, 2014: Human Rights Watch** [story](#) on Abu al-Khair's imprisonment; statements by Sarah Leah Whitson (Middle East and North Africa director) and Joe Stork, (deputy Middle East director).
 - **September 29, 2014: Law Society of Upper Canada** [expressed "grave concern"](#) about arrest, ongoing detention and sentence. For further information contact Lisa Hall at 416-947-7625 or lhall@lsuc.on.ca
 - **Jan 8, 2015: Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain/ Bahrain Center for Human Rights** [called for immediate release](#) of both Badawi and Abu al-Khair (posted by Rachel Peterson, director of communication):
 - **Jan 12, 2015: Gulf Center for Human Rights** [issued statement](#) calling for Abu al-Khair's immediate release and dropping of all charges, among other demands)
 - **PEN International** [includes](#) Abu al-Khair in their "defending writers" watchlist [Status updated after Jan 12 upholding of sentence]
 - **Jan 13, 2015** [call to action](#) from **Amnesty International**

IV: Press Coverage (Chronological)

April 20, 2012; Washington Post published op-ed by Waleed Abu al-Khair: “Steadfast in pursuing a freer Saudi Arabia”

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/steadfast-in-pursuing-a-freer-saudi-arabia/2012/04/20/gIQAoAiUWT_story.html

July 12, 2012; TIME Magazine video feature, produced in association with International Reporting Project: “In Saudi Arabia, Dissent is Alive and Well, But Only Online or in Private”

<http://world.time.com/2012/07/12/in-saudi-arabia-dissent-is-alive-and-well-but-only-online-or-in-private/>

Contact: Jacob Templin (917 288-8008); templinj1@gmail.com

October 4, 2013; Human Rights Watch: “Saudi Arabia: Jailed for Hosting Discussion Group”

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/04/saudi-arabia-jailed-hosting-discussion-group>

October 29, 2013; Al Jazeera: “Saudi Arabia frees man jailed for Mohammed tweets, jails another”

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/29/saudi-arabia-freesmanjailedformohammadtweetsjailsanother.html>

Lisa Bode: lisa.de.bode@muckrack.com (might not be direct)

Nov 26, 2013; Washington Post published op-ed by Waleed Abu al-Khair: “Sentenced in Saudi Arabia for peaceful activism”

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/sentenced-in-saudi-arabia-for-peaceful-activism/2013/11/26/95fbcc6e-507b-11e3-9fe0-fd2ca728e67c_story.html

March 19, 2014; Svenska Dagbladet: “Palm Laureate doesn’t let himself be defeated”

http://www.svd.se/nyheter/utrikes/palmepristagaren-later-sig-inte-kuvas_3376924.svd

Bitte Hammargren: bitte.hammargren@svd.se

April 16, 2014; Reuters: “Saudi authorities detain activist after court appearance: wife”

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/16/us-saudi-activist-prison-idUSBREA3F1RB20140416>

Rania El Gamal

April 16, 2014; SvD: “Palm Laureate arrested in Saudi Arabia”

<http://blog.svd.se/mellanostern/2014/04/16/palmepristagare-gripen-i-saudiarabien/>

(Bitte Hammargren)

April 17, 2014; Human Rights Watch: “Saudi Arabia: Free Prominent Rights Activist”

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/17/saudi-arabia-free-prominent-rights-activist>

April 23, 2014; Al Jazeera and Reuters: “Saudi rights activist detained, allegedly tortured”

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/4/23/saudi-activist-detainedandsubjectedtotorture.html>

June 15, 2014; MSNBC published an op-ed Abu al-Khair wrote shortly before he was detained in April 2014: “Saudi Arabia is stifling dissent in the name of counter-terrorism”

<http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/saudi-oppression-counter-terrorism-law>

June 18, 2014, New York Times op-ed by Eman Al Nafjan: “Saudi Arabia’s Duplicitous Legalism”

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/opinion/saudi-arabias-duplicitous-legalism.html?_r=0

Author’s personal email: saudiwomanblog@gmail.com

July 6, 2014; Reuters: “Saudi Arabia jails human rights activist for 15 years”

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/06/us-saudi-court-rights-idUSKBN0FB0VK20140706>

Maha El Dahan, (ed. Ralph Boulton)

July 7, 2014; CNN: “Saudi activist gets 15-year sentence for ‘inciting public opinion’”

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/07/06/world/meast/saudi-lawyer-sentence/>

Mohammed Jamjoom (no longer works at CNN)

July 7, 2014; BBC News: “Saudi Activist Waleed Abu al-Khair sentenced to prison”

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28200195>

July 7, 2014; Human Rights Watch: “Saudi Arabia: 15-year sentence for prominent activist”

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/07/saudi-arabia-15-year-sentence-prominent-activist>

August 16, 2014; Human Rights Watch: “Saudi Arabia: Imprisoned Activist Dragged, Beaten”

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/16/saudi-arabia-imprisoned-activist-dragged-beaten>

August 26, 2014; Washington Post Editorial Board: “Saudi Arabia continues its outrageous repression of human rights”

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/saudi-arabia-continues-its-outrageous-repression-of-human-rights-activists/2014/08/26/dc6404fa-2258-11e4-958c-268a320a60ce_story.html

Kevin Sullivan of the Washington Post: kevin.sullivan@washpost.com

Jan 13, 2015; Reuters: “Saudi Arabia increases jail sentence for human rights lawyer”

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/13/us-saudi-court-rights-idUSKBN0KMOSX20150113>

(Reporting by Sami Aboudi, editing by Gareth Jones)

Jan 20, 2015; Religion News Service: “Meet the tireless women working to free Raif Badawi and Waleed Abu al-Khair”

<http://chrisedman.religionnews.com/2015/01/20/meet-tireless-women-working-free-raif-badawi-waleed-abu-al-khair/>

Chris Stedman: cdstedman@gmail.com

Jan 21, 2015; AP: “Saudi Arabia’s rights crackdown linked to war on terror”

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_SAUDI_FREE_SPEECH?SITE=CARIE&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

Aya Batrawy: ayabatrawy@gmail.com

V: King Abdullah's Successors' Record on Human Rights

The new ruler of Saudi Arabia is **King Salman**; Salman's appointed successor is **Crown Prince Muqrin** (age 69). After Muqrin stands **Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef** (age 55), who is currently Minister of the Interior.

King Salman: Scholars and historians generally concur that there is little substantial difference between King Abdullah's and King Salman's stances on human rights issues. Al Jazeera quotes Salman as pledging not to change Abdullah's policies, instead staying "attached to the straight path this state has walked since its establishment."¹ NPR reports that Salman may even have found Abdullah's pace of reform to be quick, particularly in the arena of women's rights.² A Wikileaks cable shows him pointing to the United States' own relatively slow progress on rights for African-Americans, Jews and women.³ Because of Salman's age (79) and health problems (suspected dementia), he is not expected to occupy the throne for long. Bruce Riedel of the Brookings Institute reports that he has already suffered a stroke.⁴ Reports differ on the extent of his health problems: some experts believe that he is completely debilitated by dementia (and the Economist asserts he is suffering from Alzheimer's⁵), while others perceive these reports as overblown gossip.⁶

Crown Prince Muqrin: Crown Prince Muqrin served as head of intelligence, and has also contributed to Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism efforts. His background is military

¹ **Jan 24, 2015; Al Jazeera:** "Who are Saudi Arabia's new crown princes?"
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/01/saudis-crown-princes-150124083039820.html>

² **Jan 23, 2015; NPR:** "Who is the new Saudi king?" <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2015/01/23/379362258/who-is-the-new-saudi-king>

³ **"Ambassador's Farewell call on Riyadh Provincial Governor Prince Salman"**
https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07RIYADH651_a.html

⁴ **Jan 22, 2015; Brookings:** "Salman's Ascension Promises Continuity"
<http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/01/22-saudi-abdullah-death-crown-prince-salman-successor>

⁵ **Apr 5, 2014; Economist:** "The Saudi succession: Next after next..."
<http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21600180-king-abdullah-appoints-second-line-throne-next-after-next>

⁶ **Jan 23, 2015; CNN:** "Who is Saudi Arabia's new King Salman?"
<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/23/middleeast/who-is-saudi-arabia-king-salman/>
Dec 31, 2014; Washington Institute: "Succession Crisis Looms"
<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-king-in-hospital-succession-crisis-looms>

and his education includes a General Staff course in the US. He presided over collection of intelligence which some view as impinging on civil liberties.⁷ Some analysts say that his parentage—his mother was from Yemen, not a Saudi princess, and while it seems that King Abdulaziz regarded him as a full son, accounts differ on whether they were actually married—may render him ineligible to actually be crowned king.⁸

Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef: Most media analysis of the new order of Saudi succession has focused on Mohammed bin Nayef. Mohammed is seen as somewhat more liberal than other members of his cohort—he received a degree in political science from Lewis and Clark in 1981—yet as Minister of the Interior has presided over the arrests and harsh sentencing of political activists in Saudi Arabia, Abu al-Khair included. In fact, his influence has been largely to level activists with actual charges, rather than detaining them without legal cause.⁹ He is known primarily for his anti-terrorism measures, for which he has been the target of assassination attempts.¹⁰ He is viewed as favoring a more aggressive foreign policy, particularly for his attempts to eradicate the Muslim Brotherhood.¹¹

⁷ **NBC News:** “Saudi King Salman, new crown prince have long battled al Qaeda, ISIS”
<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/saudi-arabia-succession/saudi-king-salman-new-crown-prince-have-long-battled-al-n292066>

Contact: forlubna@hotmail.com

⁸ **Feb 12, 2013; Washington Institute:** “Who will be the next king of Saudi Arabia?”
<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/who-will-be-the-next-king-of-saudi-arabia>

⁹ **Jan 23, 2015; Washington Post:** “Meet the Saudi royal family’s rising star”
http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/meet-the-saudi-royal-familys-rising-star-mohammed-bin-nayef/2015/01/23/2af68108-a308-11e4-91fc-7dff95a14458_story.html

¹⁰ **Jan 23, 2015; Reuters UK:** “New Saudi Deputy Crown Prince marks generational shift”

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/01/23/us-saudi-succession-mohammed-nayef-king-idUKKBN0KW12K20150123>

¹¹ **Jan 26, 2015; New York Times:** “Saudi succession hints at shift in foreign role”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/27/world/middleeast/saudi-succession-hinting-at-shift-in-foreign-role.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=first-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news>

VI: Additional Information and Contacts

Researchers closely following Saudi Arabia:

Human Rights Watch: Adam Coogle
Amnesty International: Sevag Kechichian

HRW Main Office: (212) 290-4700

Reuters:

PR Manager Heather Carpenter- (646) 223-8551; heather.carpenter@thomsonreuters.com

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