

= Manal al @-@ Sharif =

Manal al @-@ Sharif ( Arabic : ????? ????? ) is a women 's rights activist from Saudi Arabia who helped start a women 's right to drive campaign in 2011 . A women 's rights activist who had previously filmed herself driving , Wajeha al @-@ Huwaider , filmed al @-@ Sharif driving a car as part of the campaign . The video was posted on YouTube and Facebook . Al @-@ Sharif was detained and released on 21 May and rearrested the following day . On 30 May , al @-@ Sharif was released on bail , on the conditions of returning for questioning if requested , not driving and not talking to the media . The New York Times and Associated Press associated the women 's driving campaign with the wider pattern of the Arab Spring and the long duration of al @-@ Sharif 's detention with Saudi authorities ' fear of protests .

Following her driving campaign , al @-@ Sharif remained an active critic of the Saudi government , tweeting on issues including imprisoned female foreign workers , the lack of elections for the Shura Council , and the murder of Lama al @-@ Ghamdi . Her work has been recognized by Foreign Policy , Time , and the Oslo Freedom Forum .

= = Background = =

Manal al @-@ Sharif graduated from King Abdulaziz University with a Bachelor of Science in computing and a Cisco Career Certification . Until May 2012 , she worked as an Internet Security Consultant for Saudi Aramco , the Saudi national oil company . She also wrote for Al Watan , a Saudi daily .

= = Women 's rights campaigns = =

In addition to her professional career , al @-@ Sharif has campaigned for women 's rights in Saudi Arabia for many years . According to the New York Times , al @-@ Sharif " has a reputation for pulling stunts to highlight the lack of rights for women " . Regarding the 2011 women driving campaign , Amnesty International stated that " Manal al @-@ Sharif is following in a long tradition of women activists around the world who have put themselves on the line to expose and challenge discriminatory laws and policies " .

= = = Women 's driving rights in Saudi Arabia = = =

As of 2013 , women in Saudi Arabia have limited freedom of movement and in practice are not allowed to drive motor vehicles . In 1990 , dozens of women in Riyadh drove their cars in protest , were imprisoned for one day , had their passports confiscated , and some of them lost their jobs . In September 2007 , the Association for the Protection and Defense of Women 's Rights in Saudi Arabia , co @-@ founded by Wajeha al @-@ Huwaider and Fawzia al @-@ Uyyouni , gave a 1 @,@ 100 signature petition to King Abdullah asking for women to be allowed to drive . On International Women 's Day 2008 , Huwaider filmed herself driving and received international media attention after the video was posted on YouTube . Inspired by the Arab Spring , a woman from Jeddah , Najla Hariri , started driving in the second week of May 2011 , stating " Before in Saudi , you never heard about protests . [ But ] after what has happened in the Middle East , we started to accept a group of people going outside and saying what they want in a loud voice , and this has had an impact on me . "

= = = 2011 women driving campaign = = =

In 2011 , a group of women including Manal al @-@ Sharif started a Facebook campaign named " Teach me how to drive so I can protect myself " or " Women2Drive " that says that women should be allowed to drive . The campaign calls for women to start driving from 17 June 2011 . By 21 May 2011 , about 12 @,@ 000 readers of the Facebook page had expressed their support . Al @-@

Sharif describes the action as acting within women 's rights , and " not protesting " . Wajeha al @-@ Huwaider was impressed by the campaign and decided to help .

In late May , Al @-@ Sharif drove her car in Khobar with al @-@ Huwaider filming . The video was posted to YouTube and Facebook . In the video , al @-@ Sharif stated , " This is a volunteer campaign to help the girls of this country [ learn to drive ] . At least for times of emergency , God forbid . What if whoever is driving them gets a heart attack ? " She was detained by the religious police ( CPVPV ) on 21 May and released after six hours . By 23 May 2011 , about 600 @,@ 000 people had watched the video .

The YouTube video of al @-@ Sharif 's drive became inaccessible at its original location , the Facebook page for the campaign was deleted , and the Twitter account used by al @-@ Sharif was " copied and altered " . Supporters republished the original video and Facebook page and a summary of al @-@ Sharif 's five recommended rules for the 17 June campaign were published on a blog and by the New York Times .

On 22 May , al @-@ Sharif was detained again and the Director General of Traffic Administration , Major @-@ General Suleiman Al @-@ Ajlan , was questioned by journalists regarding traffic regulations related to women driving . Al @-@ Ajlan stated that the journalists should " put the question " to members of the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia . RTBF suggested that al @-@ Sharif had been sentenced to five days ' imprisonment .

The New York Times described al @-@ Sharif 's campaign as a " budding protest movement " that the Saudi government tried to " swiftly extinguish " . Associated Press said that Saudi authorities " cracked down harder than usual on al @-@ Sharif , after seeing her case become a rallying call for youths anxious for change " in the context of the Arab Spring . Both news organisations attributed the long duration of al @-@ Sharif 's detention to Saudi authorities ' fear of a wider protest movement in Saudi Arabia . Amnesty International declared Al @-@ Sharif to be a prisoner of conscience and called for her immediate and unconditional release .

The day after al @-@ Sharif 's arrest , another woman was detained for driving a car . She drove with two women passengers in Ar Rass and was detained by traffic police in the presence of the CPVPV . She was released after signing a statement that she would not drive again . In reaction to al @-@ Sharif 's arrest , several more Saudi women published videos of themselves driving during the following days . On 26 May , authorities said that al @-@ Sharif would remain in detention until 5 June 2011 , according to Waleed Abu Al @-@ Khair . Al @-@ Sharif was conditionally freed on 30 May . Her lawyer Adnan al @-@ Saleh said that she had been charged with " inciting women to drive " and " rallying public opinion " . The conditions of Al @-@ Sharif 's release include bail , returning for questioning if requested , not driving and not talking to the media . As possible reasons for al @-@ Sharif 's early release , The National cited al @-@ Sharif having written a letter to King Abdullah , 4 @,@ 500 Saudis signing an online petition to the King , and " an outpouring of indignation and disbelief by both Saudis and critics abroad that Ms al @-@ Sharif was jailed for something that is not a moral or criminal offence . "

Al @-@ Sharif filed an objection with the General Directorate of Traffic in Riyadh on 15 November 2011 because of officials rejecting her driver 's licence application . Samar Badawi filed a similar lawsuit on 4 February 2012 .

= = = 2011 women prisoners campaign = = =

Following her 30 May release from prison , al @-@ Sharif started a Twitter campaign called " Faraj " to release Saudi , Filipino and Indonesian women prisoners in the Dammam women 's prison who " are locked up just because they owe a small sum of money but cannot afford to pay the debt " . Al @-@ Sharif said that the women prisoners were mostly domestic workers who remained in prison after completing their prison terms , because they could not pay their debts and because their former Saudi employers did not help to release them or fund their flights to return to their countries of origin . She referred to 22 Indonesian women and named four women needing help and stated the amount of their debts . She called for donations to be made directly to the director of the Dammam women 's prison in order to reimburse the women 's debts and free them .

= = Post @-@ campaign = =

On 23 January 2012 , al @-@ Sharif was mistakenly reported dead in a car crash in Jeddah . On 25 January , The Guardian confirmed that she was in fact alive , and that the actual victim was an " unnamed member of a desert community " who was not involved in the female driving campaign .

Following al @-@ Sharif 's arrests , she reported being increasingly marginalized by her employers at Aramco . She quit following a dispute over her trip to Norway to receive the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent .

In December 2012 , al @-@ Sharif criticized an initiative by the Saudi government to inform husbands via SMS when their wives or dependents leave the country , in accordance with a law making men the legal guardians of their wives . " The small fact of the SMS story gives you the idea of the bigger problem with the whole guardianship system " , she wrote on Twitter . When King Abdullah appointed women to the advisory Shura Council for the first time in January 2013 , al @-@ Sharif criticized the reform as too small , noting that the Council was still not an elected body and could not pass legislation . In February , she worked to bring international attention to the case of five @-@ year @-@ old Lama al @-@ Ghamdi , whose father Fayhan al @-@ Ghamdi fatally raped , beat , and burned her ; he served four months in jail and paid 200 @,@ 000 riyals ( roughly US \$ 50 @,@ 000 ) in blood money .

= = Recognition = =

Foreign Policy magazine named al @-@ Sharif one of the Top 100 Global Thinkers of 2011 , and she was listed in Forbes list of Women Who ( Briefly ) Rocked in the same year . In 2012 , al @-@ Sharif was named one of the Fearless Women of the year by The Daily Beast , and Time magazine named her one of the 100 Most Influential People of 2012 . She was also one of three people awarded the first annual Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent at the Oslo Freedom Forum .