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The Observatory
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Union Internationale des Avocats
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Joint Press Release

SAUDI ARABIA: Appeal Court confirms sentence against human rights lawyer Waleed Abu Al-Khair to 15 years

Paris-Geneva, February 20, 2015 - Specialized Criminal Court of Appeal in Riyadh endorses a 15-year sentence against lawyer Waleed Abu Al-Khair. The conviction of the human rights lawyer jailed on April 15, 2014 should be overturned and he should immediately and unconditionally be released, declared the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a joint programme of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture – OMCT) and the *Union Internationale des Avocats* (UIA - International Association of Lawyers).

On February 15, 2015, the Specialized Criminal Court of Appeal in Riyadh, which deals with terrorism cases, confirmed the sentence of 15 years in prison, a travel ban of equal duration following imprisonment, and a fine of SR 200,000 (approximately EUR 46,957) against human rights lawyer **Waleed Abu Al-Khair**. The charges against him are “striving to overthrow the state and the authority of the King”, “criticising and insulting the judiciary”, “assembling international organisations against the Kingdom”, “creating and supervising an unlicensed organisation”, and “contributing to the establishment of another” and “preparing and storing information that will affect public security”.

“No lawyer should suffer prosecution for any legitimate activities undertaken in the course of representing a client or for the promotion and protection of human rights. The UIA will continue to denounce the injustice done to our colleague”, said UIA President Miguel Loinaz.

On February 4, 2015, Mr. Abu Al-Khair was transferred from Malaz prison to Al-Ha'ir rehabilitation prison in Riyadh, approximately 1,000 km away from his home city without any warning. This is Abu Al-Khair's sixth transfer and came after his refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the trial court and to apologise.

“Waleed Abu Al-Khair's summary and arbitrary sentence is a clear attempt to harass and discredit his tremendous human rights work. Charges against him are completely unfounded and he must immediately and unconditionally be released”, said FIDH President Karim Lahidji. ***“Saudi authorities must stop the persecution of human rights activists and lawyers”***, he added.

Our organisations recall that Waleed Abu Al-Khair is a prominent human rights lawyer, Founder and Director of the Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (MHRSA). The application to register the organisation as a human rights NGO was rejected. Mr. Abu Al-Khair also acted as lawyer of the prominent human rights defender **Raif Badawi**. In 2012, he was awarded the Olof Palme Prize for human rights for his “strong, self-sacrificing and sustained struggle to promote respect for human and civil rights for both men and women in Saudi Arabia”.

“The Saudi authorities should immediately release Waleed Abu Al-Khair as his conviction is aimed at preventing him from carrying out his legitimate and peaceful human rights activities in Saudi Arabia”, said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

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