

+41 225934701

info@genevacouncil.com

<http://genevacouncil.com>

Rue du Pré-de-la-Bichette, Nation Business Center,
6ème étage, Genève-Switzerland

Urgent Appeal to:

Ms. Leigh Toomey, (Chair-Rapporteur) (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention,
Ms. Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Geneva 08 april 2021

Dear Ms. Leigh Toomey, Ms. Irene Khan

We at the Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties (GCRL), write to you with utmost urgency regarding the latest case developments of the Saudi humanitarian aid worker and internet activist Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, and we express serious concerns about reports related to prison sentence against him, as it constitutes a violation of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the right to be free of arbitrary detention.

Recently, Mr Abdulrahman al-Sadhan has been sentenced to 20 years in prison and given a 20 years travel ban for allegedly running an anonymous social media account by the Saudi Specialized Criminal Court, after he has forcibly disappeared and arbitrarily detained since 3 years in Al-Ha'ir prison.

During his 3 years in detention, he has not been granted the right to a lawyer, and has not been allowed to regular contact with his family. According to his sister Ms Areej al-Sadhan, he has been tortured by his jailers, and has been held in poor conditions which put his health at risk, particularly during the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

On March 12, 2018 plainclothes members of the General Directorate of Investigation in Saudi Arabia arbitrarily arrested Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan, without specific charges against him, neither an official judicial warrant or providing any reason for the arrest. He was arrested at the main offices of the Saudi Red Crescent Society in the capital, Riyadh, where he worked as an aid worker. The General Directorate of Investigation is affiliated with the Presidency of State Security, which is a security and intelligence institution, established by royal order from King Salman bin Abdulaziz on 20 July 2017, and is linked to the King himself.

Abdulrahman was 34 when he was arrested. After graduating from Notre Dame de Namur University in California, he returned to Saudi Arabia to help his own country. He dedicated his life to helping others and joined the Red Crescent where he worked in assisting the ambulance operation committee and coordinating rescue operations and emergency relief for victims.

Al-Sadhan had a shadow account on Twitter, which is common in Saudi Arabia where civic space is totally closed and freedom of expression is considered a crime, He used this account to peacefully express his opinion on public affairs or support human rights issues. It is reported that the Saudi authorities have recruited a network of individuals in the United States, including employees of Twitter, who have leaked information on 6000 Twitter accounts, including Al-Sadhan's account, which led to his arrest.

Six months after Al-Sadhan's arrest, the Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi was brutally murdered by the same regime, from here began our concerns as a human rights organization about the fate of Al-Sadhan and hundreds of prisoners of conscience and victims of the wave of arrests of human rights defenders, writers, and intellectuals in Saudi Arabia in 2018.

The deterioration of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia has been going on since King Salman came to the throne in 2015, and increasingly deteriorated as his son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has gained ever-greater powers and influence. The number of prisoners of conscience in this country has risen sharply, human rights activists, advocates of reform, independent public figures... They are now nearly all behind bars.

This is the reality of Saudi Arabia under the ruling of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, we have seen more human right abuses and crimes than any time before. The Saudi authorities continued throughout 2018 to attack free speech. The government exerts total control over all domestic media, and prevents activists and independent journalists from expressing their views. They have targeted a number of websites and Internet accounts by blocking and hacking them, and have contracted foreign companies to carry out cyber espionage and hacks. These violations must stop, and this systematic onslaught has often been referred to as a war on terror, especially when the Counter-terrorism Law has been invoked against human rights activists. The majority of prisoners of conscience have been tried in the Specialized Criminal Court, the court that deals with terrorism cases.

The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights promotes the absolute prohibition of arbitrary restriction of the freedoms of individuals in Article IX under the text “No person shall be subject to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.”

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right without which it is impossible to safeguard other human rights and build healthy societies. We at the Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties, consider the recent Al-Sadhan’s trial as another sad example of the unfair legal system in Saudi Arabia that denies the right to live freely and the right to freedom of expression

Accordingly, we submits this urgent appeal to call for the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression, to do everything in their power to pressure the Saudi authorities to release Abdulrahman al-Sadhan and cease arbitrary arrests against bloggers, humanitarian and human rights activist, preachers and scholars under the pretext of fighting terrorism and urges it to review its anti-terrorism legislation.

Freedom of expression should never be a crime

Should you have any additional queries on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please accept, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Sincerely,
Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties