

29 May 2017

## **Qatar/Saudi Arabia: Human rights defender Mohammed Al-Otaibi forcibly deported to Saudi Arabia**

On 25 May 2017 at dawn, security officials at Hamad International Airport, Qatar, arrested Saudi human rights defender, **Mohammed Al-Otaibi**, and forcibly deported him to Saudi Arabia to face trial. The human rights defender and his wife were on their way to Norway following the Norwegian government's decision to exceptionally provide them with travel documents and a humanitarian visa.

[Mohammed Al-Otaibi](#) is known in Saudi Arabia for his human rights work. He worked specifically to promote the rights of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip at the outset of 2009, when he was arrested for the first time by Saudi Authorities. The human rights defender remained in prison for almost three years and seven months following his arrest. After his release, Mohammed Al-Otaibi co-founded the **Union for Human Rights** in Riyadh in 2013 which had several objectives, including the abolition of the death penalty and strengthening women's role in society in Saudi Arabia. He worked with the organisation for three years despite constant harassment by the Saudi government for issuing international appeals to highlight human rights violations committed by the Saudi government.

In December 2016, the human rights defender was referred to the Specialised Criminal Court after being questioned over the course of a number of years by the Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecution in Riyadh. He faces the charges of 'participating in an illegal association' and 'offending the reputation of the Kingdom by publishing and signing statements and false reports on the internet and collaborating with international human rights organisations'. The human rights defender arrived in Qatar on 30 March 2017 with his wife, searching for safe haven. International human rights NGOs, including **Front Line Defenders**, called upon the authorities in Qatar to take all measures to ensure his full protection and safety, including that he not be returned to Saudi Arabia. The human rights defender's wife was not deported with her husband and is still in Qatar. The Qatari ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on 28 May 2017 that the deportation of Al-Otaibi has been carried out in accordance with the bilateral judicial and security agreements between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The human rights defender's whereabouts remains unknown.

The crackdown on human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia using anti-terrorism legislation has been on the rise in the past few years. The charges against Mohamed Al-Otaibi, which are considered offences against the state, are being examined under the special court according to the counter-terrorism legislation. In 2014, Saudi Arabia enacted a new anti-terrorism law that has been increasingly used by the Saudi government to target human rights defenders (HRDs) and silence dissent. Several HRDs have received harsh sentences by anti-terrorism courts, including lengthy prison terms. Long before 2014, anti-terrorism legislation was commonly used to prosecute human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia through the Specialised Criminal Court, which was set up in Saudi Arabia in 2008 to try terrorism cases.

Front Line Defenders condemns the forcible deportation of Mohammed Al-Otaibi by Qatari authorities and urges the authorities in Saudi Arabia to reveal information on his whereabouts.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Saudi Arabia to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release **Mohamed Al-Otaibi**, drop all the charges against him and allow him to travel, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Mohamed Al-Otaibi and ensure that he has an immediate and unfettered access to his family and lawyer;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Mohamed Al-Otaibi, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the '*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.